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# SNOW BIRD.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE FAWN AND THE BEAR.

THERE was quite an excitement among the young ladies in Madame Pinette's boarding-school at St. Louis, when one of their number was called for, and the messenger who made the announcement also brought the news that her father had come to see her and to take her away.

St. Louis was comparatively a small town at that time; but it was rapidly growing in wealth and importance, as it was the emporium of the western fur-trade. It was also the center of intelligence and education for a considerable section of country, an honor which it had previously disputed with Cape Girardeau and St. Genevieve. The boarding-school of Madame Pinette was the most fashionable and select establishment of the kind in the young city, and its directress was considered a model of propriety and refinement.

The father of Jeannette Barteau was generally considered as a mythical personage among the inmates of Madame Pinette's establishment; indeed, there were some among them who doubted his existence, and who seemed to consider Jeannette a sort of *filia nullius*, whose parents were not willing to own her, although they supported her in good style. These young ladies might have hesitated to associate with Jeannette, had it not been a known and established fact that Madame Pinette would never receive into her school any person concerning whose respectability there could be the slightest doubt.

As for the directress, as Madame Pinette chose to style herself, she knew as little about the parentage of Jeannette as any of her pupils. In fact, she had already imparted the extent of her information on the subject to the young ladies,

and the story was related to every new arrival as a necessary portion of the history of the establishment.

The story was simply this: Many years before, when Madame Pinette's school was a very small and unpretending affair, Jeannette, who was then a child of about four years of age, had been brought to the directress by a French merchant, a gentleman of high standing and undoubted integrity. He represented the child as being the daughter of a friend of his, who was engaged in the fur business in the far west, and whose duties seldom permitted him to visit St. Louis. He requested Madame Pinette to take the child into her establishment, to educate her and bring her up in the best style, and to be a mother to her. To secure the fulfilment of this request, he placed in the hands of the directress a considerable sum of money, assuring her that as large an amount would be paid to her yearly, as long as she continued to take care of the child. Under these circumstances Jeannette was received into Madame Pinette's establishment, was treated as one of her own children, and had been with her ever since. There was nothing very surprising about this story, but the young ladies could not help wondering why Jeannette's father had never come to see her, still what manner of man he was, if he really had an existence. The French merchant had died a few years after placing the child at the school; but the money for Jeannette's maintenance was still received, sometimes from one source, and sometimes from another.

Jeannette seemed to be very well satisfied with the situation of affairs. She had grown up with sufficient sense, under the management of Madame Pinette, not to trouble herself unnecessarily about such matters. She loved the directress as a mother, and gave but little thought to a father whom she did not remember, and who did not even write to her. She found herself well clothed, boarded and educated, and supplied with every necessity and luxury that she could reasonably desire. Under the teachings of Madame Pinette, she contented herself with affairs as she found them, and applied herself diligently to her studies and other duties, until she became a well-educated and accomplished young lady. If she had any wonderings, misgivings or longings, concerning the

father of whom she knew only the name, she was careful to keep them to herself, or confided them only to the sympathizing Madame Pinette.

It would be doing Jeannette an injustice, however, to say that she was not deeply affected when she received the announcement that this unknown parent had at last arrived, and that he had come to take her from the pleasant home in which most of her life had been spent. She was anxious to see him; but there was a feeling of fear mingled with her natural desire, a painful sense of doubt and distrust, producing a nervous timidity which she could not shake off. Her hands trembled so that she could hardly arrange her dress, and she declined the assistance of the girls who clustered around her, with a peevishness that was quite unusual with her.

At last she was ready; the finishing touch was put to her toilet, and, after a last look at her pale face in the glass, she went down-stairs with timid and hesitating steps, followed by the curious glances of her companions. She could not guess what sort of a man it was she was about to meet; for none of the girls had ventured to peep into the reception-room, the servant who announced him had not seen the stranger, and Madame Pinette happened to be away from home when he arrived.

Again she hesitated, with her hand upon the knob, when she reached the door of the room in which he was supposed to be waiting for her, and it was with a palpitating heart that she at last entered and saw before her—what?

He was no gentleman, certainly—no gentleman, at least, in the boarding-school sense of the word—that man who was awkwardly seated on an ottoman near the fire-place. He was a rough and weather-beaten man, somewhat past the prime of life, with long, straggling hair and grizzled beard, and a cast of countenance that was by no means inviting to a young lady of education and refinement. He was clad in a blue swallow-tailed coat, striped vest, and yellow pantaloons, all of which fitted him badly, and seemed to give him the greatest possible discomfort. It was evident that he was a wild mountaineer, who had donned civilized attire for this

special occasion, and who was miserable in consequence of his change of garb. He was not entirely transformed, however, as he had not been able to induce his extremities to submit to the torture of hat and boots. His feet were incased in gayly-ornamented moccasins, of the Chippewa fashion, and his head was covered with a gray foxskin cap, which he had not thought of removing.

Altogether, he was a very uncouth sort of person, and Jeannette's first feeling toward him was one of positive repulsion. She was glad to seat her trembling form in a chair near the door, where she waited for him to speak; but her disgust and fear were by no means decreased when he addressed her.

"Your name is Jeannette Barteau, I allow," said the mountaineer, as he rose from his seat, which he did not attempt to resume during the remainder of the interview.

"Yes, sir," timidly replied Jeannette, without raising her eyes.

"Then you are my gal, I reckon, and I've come to elaim you. It's been a long time sence I've set eyes onto you, 'cause you war nothin' but a kitten when I brought you hyar, and I hain't been inside of this settlement from that day to this."

"Yes, sir," faintly responded Jeannette again.

"I've done well by you, my gal, and I'm thinkin' that you cain't say a word against me on that score. I saved my money, and didn't spend it drinkin' or gamblin' or foolin' with the squaws, as most of our men do; but sent it on hyar to St. Louey, fur to hev you raised and eddicated like a lady. I allow that I've tried to do the fair thing by you, my gal."

"I am sure that I am very much obliged to you, sir," replied Jeannette, thinking that she must say something to express her gratitude.

"I meant that you should be a lady, and a lady you are, if ever thar was one on this airth. It ain't a bit too much to say that you are a heap prettier than any pictur' I ever sot eyes onto. I s'pose you are ready and willin' to go with your dad now; ain't you?"

Jeannette's answer was an unintelligible murmur, which the mountaineer interpreted as conveying her assent.

"I've got a power of things to tell you about," continued Jean Barreau, twisting and moving himself uneasily; "but I was never much of a hand at a palaver, and these lyar settlement clothes are so cussed uncomfortable that I kin hardly jerk out the few words that come to me. You allow that I've done the fa'r thing in havin' you raised up like a ady?"

"I am sure that I am very much obliged to you," faintly repeated Jannette.

"It's only nateral that I should hev had a motive in so doin', and I ain't goin' to deny that I did hev a motive. When I was spendin' my money on you, instid of throwin' it away, I allowed that I was investin' it, as the traders say, and I was hopin' to git it back after years had gone by. The time fur gittin' it back has come, my gal, or it must come afore long. This hoss is gittin' old, you see, and he has been through a powerful sight of rough work and hardships, to say nothin' of Injin scrapes, all to git the money to pay fur your raisin' and schoolin'. It would suit him mighty well to settle down somewhar, and live easy and comfortable fur the rest of his life."

"I hope you will be able to do as you propose," murmured Jeannette, who wondered to what this prelude was to lead.

"Glad to hear you say so. Children should love their parents, and obey 'em, and I reckon you're the right sort. It jest depends on you, my gal, to say whether your old dad shall live easy and comfortable. You are mighty purty, as I said afore, and it will be no manner of trouble fur a gal of your looks and eddication to marry a rich man, who will be able to take keer of her and her kin. You'll be glad to hear, I reckon, that I've already picked out the right kind of a man."

Jeannette raised her eyes, and looked fairly at the mountaineer for the first time, with an expression of fear and intense anxiety on her pale countenance.

"Don't say that, I beg you!" was her piteous appeal. "I will do any thing else that you wish me to do. I can teach school, and can do many things. I will use the education

that you have given me in any way but that. I will work for you as hard as I can, and I am sure that I can support you comfortably, if you will give me time to try; but, do not ask me to marry."

"I didn't raise you up a lady, to make you work like a squaw," replied Barteau, with a very unpleasant leer. "It's a way that gals hev got, as I've hearn tell, to draw back when some 'un tells 'em to marry, though they are powerful eager when they take the notion themselves. But hyar, what cain't put up with any sech foolishness as that. I've told you what I want, and it has p'intedly got to be so. I hev picked out the man to suit me, and he ort to suit you, as he is rich and good-lookin', though he ain't quite so young as he mought be. His name is Jeems Musson, and I reckon you've seen him more'n once."

Jeannette's expression of fear and anxiety deepened into a look of terror as she heard this name; for she *had* seen James Musson, and he was so odious to her that she hoped she might never see him again.

"You ain't skeered of him, I hope," said Barteau, who was watching her intently.

The lips of the girl moved, as if she was about to make an appeal or a protest; but her intention suddenly changed; for she said nothing; only her face turned a trifle paler, the lips that would have opened were resolutely pressed together, and from her downcast eyes there stole glances of defiance and determination.

"What say you, gal? My mind is made up, and I am waitin' to hear yours."

"I have seen the man of whom you speak; but I know little about him," replied Jeannette, speaking quite slowly and deliberately. "Your judgment should be better than mine, and I have no doubt that I ought to try and please you."

"That's the notion, my gal!" exclaimed the mountaineer, slapping his thigh emphatically. "I was sartin you war the right sort, and I am glad to see you so willin' and obedient. I don't mean to hurry you about it, but will let you take your own time, purty nigh. I only want the matter understood. I hev jest this to say now—that I will come in the

mornin' to take you away from hyar, ar-1 you may go to work and git your possibles packed and ready."

"My what, sir?"

"Your finery and fixin's. I must go now, as I am in a hurry to shed these tormented dry-goods. Good-by, my gal, and remember to be ready 'arly in the mornin'."

Jeannette bowed in silence, and rose from her seat as he started to leave. He did not offer to kiss her, but took her little white hand in his broad and horny palm, and held it there a moment, looking at it as if it was something very wonderful and valuable. As he did so, she perceived that he had been drinking, for she smelled the fumes of villainous whisky, and she could hardly conceal her disgust.

At last he went away, to her great relief, followed by the curious eyes of the school-girls, whose heads crowded every available window in Madame Pinette's establishment. Jeannette hastened up to her own room, threw herself on the bed, and burst into tears.

"I do not believe that that dreadful man is my father," was her sobbing reply to the sympathizing questions of her room-mate.

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## CHAPTER II.

### A DISAPPEARANCE.

JEANNETTE BARTEAU had good reason for the fear and anxiety which she manifested when her father spoke to her concerning marriage, and when he mentioned James Musson as the person whom he had chosen for her husband.

She had not turned seventeen without receiving the homage of several young gentlemen, and she had her own notions concerning the person whom she intended to marry. In fact, she had fixed her affections upon Henri Labardi, a clerk in a fur house in St. Louis, who was both young and handsome, although he was not wealthy. Henri had told her that he loved her, and had been assured that her love was returned. They had vowed eternal fidelity, and were only

"waiting a while" until circumstances should justify them in marrying.

Jeannette did not long remain bathed in tears and lying on her bed. She had formed her resolution while she was in the presence of Jean Barteau, as soon as she learned what his intention really was, and she was only giving temporary indulgence to her disappointment and vexation when she returned to her room.

She soon arose, fiercely rejecting the consolations of her room-mate, dried her tears, arranged her toilet, put on her hat and shawl, and sallied forth alone from Madame Pinette's establishment.

She went rapidly down the street toward the river, but walked more slowly when she came among the business houses, and looked anxiously about her. Her eyes brightened as she caught sight of a handsome young man with a notebook and pencil in his hand; and he must have spied her at the same moment, for he quickened his steps as he advanced toward her.

"I have been looking for you, Henri, and am so glad to see you," said Jeannette, as she met her lover.

"You are more fortunate than I am, for I am always looking for you, and can never find you," replied her lover.

"Something has happened, Henri, or I would not have come alone to seek you here."

"What is the matter? Has Madame Pinette been scolding you, or do you wish me to furnish flowers for your May festival?"

"It is something more important than that, Henri—something that concerns us both, and we must decide and act immediately."

"You surprise me. Tell me at once what has happened."

"My father has arrived."

"Your father! I hardly believed that you had a father. Where did he come from? Why has he been so long absent from you? What sort of a man is he? Did you tell him of our plans?"

"You almost stun me with your questions. Which shall I answer first? Let me tell you what sort of a man he

is, and you will be better able to understand me. Henri, I can hardly believe that he is my father."

"Without doubt, then, he is not a nice man."

"Nice! There is nothing nice about him, I can assure you. I never saw a rougher or more uncouth man in my life. He did not seem to know what to do with his hands or feet, and I am sure that Madame Pinette's reception-room was the first parlor he ever saw. He looked like a dressed-up bear, in the most outlandish garments imaginable, and I suppose that he never wore any civilized habiliments before, for he said that his clothes were a torment to him, and he had Indian moccasins on his feet, and a skin cap on his head."

"I presume that he must be a trapper or trader of the far west, and he may be a very honest and well-meaning man. I have seen many of those people, and they have their good qualities, though they are mere animals as a general thing."

"Honest! Let me tell you what he proposed to me, and then you shall judge of his honesty. He plainly told me that he had caused me to be brought up and educated as a lady, in order that he might speculate on me when I grew up. He took great credit to himself for what he had done, but said he expected to be well paid for his investment. It was his purpose, he declared, that I should marry some rich man, who would be able and willing to take care of him, so that he might spend the remainder of his life in ease and comfort."

"It was useless, then, to speak to him of me, as I am by no means rich."

"Of course it was, especially as he went on to mention the name of the man whom he had picked out for my husband, and whom he intended that I should marry. Who do you think it was, Henri?"

"Not knowing your father or his acquaintances, I can not even guess."

"Give me your arm, Henri, and let us walk out toward the suburbs. Of all the men in the world, who do you think it was?"

"I can think of no one but the President of the United States, or Mr. Astor."

"Nearer home than that, Henri Labardie; it was James Musson!"

"My God!" exclaimed the young gentleman, whose interest seemed to be suddenly excited. "This is a serious matter, Jeannette. That scoundrel, James Musson? He is reputed to be rich; but he is known to be a gambler and believed to be a forger, and no gentleman will associate with him."

"I know it. You have told me what he is, and the very sight of the man is hateful to me."

"What did you say to this proposal, Jeannette?"

"Nothing about you, you may be sure, for that would only have made the matter worse. As soon as I could recover from the panic into which I was thrown by the mention of the name of James Musson, my resolution was taken, and I pretended to assent to his plan. This pleased him, and he said that he would not hurry me to the marriage, but would come to-morrow morning to take me from Madame Pinette's. Then he was kind enough to go away, and I noticed, Henri, that he had been drinking rum."

"A fine speculation, truly! It is no wonder, Jeannette, that you can not regard him as your father. What resolution was it that you say you had formed?"

"That I would not be sold to any man, and least of all to James Musson. I decided that I could not go with my father—if he is my father—to be used by him for any such purpose. I resolved that I would marry no one, if I can not marry the man of my choice. When Mr. Barteau comes for me in the morning, he will not find me at Madame Pinette's. I must fly from him, and must hide from him."

"Then you will fly with me, my own Jeannette! I am glad that this has happened, for it removes the only obstacle to our union. I have been offered a good situation at a trading-post in the mountains, and a train is to start westward to-morrow. Will you go with me, Jeannette? I fear it will be a rough life for you; but I can assure you of my love and fidelity, and you will at least be free from James Musson."

"Can we be married before we start?" asked Jeannette, as she hid her face on her lover's breast.

"Of course. If you can slip out of Madame Pinette's to-night, I will persuade Father Martin to marry us at the chapel

before daybreak, and we will take our place in the train as soon as the ceremony is over."

"It is settled, then!" eagerly exclaimed Jeannette. "Let us say nothing more about it now, Henri; for I do not wish to speak or think of it again until it is accomplished. I wish only to act, and I must hasten to make my preparations. You, also, have doubtless much to do, and it is nearly dusk. I must go home, or they will be inquiring about me. Good-night, Henri."

"Farewell, my love, until I meet you in the street near Madame Pinette's. It will not be long, remember, before Father Martin makes us one, and then we can bid defiance to the world."

They then separated, and Jeannette hastened to Madame Pinette's, where she maintained her usual composure at the supper-table, and retired to her own room as if nothing out of the usual course of affairs had happened. Once there, however she busied herself in making such preparations as she could for her long and difficult journey. She was obliged to take her room-mate into her confidence; but that young lady fully sympathized with her, and promised to keep the matter a profound secret.

A few hours after midnight, she stole quietly out into the street, where she found Henri Labardie waiting for her with a carriage. They were conveyed to the chapel, and were soon united by Father Martin, after which the carriage took the young couple to the rendezvous of the wagon-train that was to start for the far west that morning.

In the morning Jean Bartean, again arrayed in his "store clothes," and feeling excessively uncomfortable, called at Madame Pinette's for his daughter; but he found the establishment in an uproar, and was met by the announcement that Jeannette had disappeared, and that no one about the place could tell what had become of her.

Instantly connecting the statement with the too sudden declaration of his intentions that he had made to her, he concluded that Jeannette had absconded for the purpose of avoiding him, and that she had had assistance in so doing.

He charged Madame Pinette with being an accomplice of the runaway, and with hiding her from him. She warmly

repelled the accusation, and he became so excited on the subject, and was so profane and violent, that she was obliged to order him to leave her house, threatening to call officers to arrest him if he did not go quietly. He went at last, vowing vengeance on mankind in general, and declaring that he would find the girl, if she was above ground.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED MEETINGS.

AFTER leaving Madame Pinette's, Jean Barreau went direct to a sort of third class hotel, much frequented by men from the mountains and the plains, which he had made his headquarters during his stay in St. Louis.

Here he hastily divested himself of his civilized attire, and clothed himself in his own garb, which consisted of hunting-shirt and leggings of dressed deerskin.

"Wagh!" he exclaimed, as he shook himself and stretched his long limbs. "This horse is a sight too old to be l'arni new ways. If I ever mount sech fixin's ag'in, I hope I may be rubbed out by the fust red-skin I meet! Now I will see what Mister Jeems Musson has to say about this hyar stampede."

So saying, he strode fiercely down-stairs, and knocked at the door of a room at the end of a long passage.

"Come in!" said a small, thin and squeaking voice.

The trapper opened the door, and found himself in the presence of a man who was seated at a table, occasionally dealing cards from a pack, laying them before him, and figuring on a sheet of paper. He was evidently studying combinations of cards, and calculating chances.

James Musson—for this was the person who was so odious to Jeannette Barreau—was a man of medium height and figure, with sandy hair and freckled complexion, thin lips, and cold, gray eyes. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and presented quite a gentlemanly appearance.

"I knew it was you, Barteau," he said, as soon as he saw the trapper. "Take a chair, and tell me what you have done about our business."

"I don't sit down on those fixin's when I ken help it, Jeems Musson," replied Barteau. "Is there any brandy within reach?"

"Certainly; I always keep it on hand, and it is as free as water to my friends. Help yourself, old boy."

Musson set a decanter and some glasses on the table; but the trapper did not deign to use a glass. He put the decanter to his lips, and when he took it away it was more than half emptied.

"It's goin' on fourteen years now," he said, as he replaced the decanter on the table, "since I've drunk enough spirits to set my head whirlin', and I reckon I shall hev to pitch into 'em now, to make up for lost time."

"I hope, then, that all has gone well with you. Where have you caged that pretty bird of yours? Do you think she will be an obedient child?"

"That game is up, I am afraid, Jeems Musson. All is gone, boss and beaver. I bet every thin', and my pile is lost, as far as I ken see now."

"What do you mean?"

"The gal is gone, Jeems Musson. She has run away, eloped, stampeded, and I mought as well try to foller one track among a herd of buffler, as to hunt her trail in this settlement."

"What is the matter? You must have frightened her in some way. Tell me what you said to her, and how she acted."

The trapper gave an account, in his own style, of his interview with Jeannette, and of his subsequent discovery of her disappearance, including the scene with Madame Pinette.

"You have frightened her away, as I told you," said Musson. "You played your game too brash, old boy, and showed your hand too soon. I am inclined to think that it is an elopement."

"A what?"

"A runaway marriage, or something worse. When you spoke to her of me, did she say nothing about having a preference for some young man of her acquaintance?"

"Not a word."

"She is a deep one, then. Of course you are not simple enough to suppose that she has grown up without having had admirers?"

"I hadn't thought of it, but it is like enough that she has had a plenty, for she's as purty as a picture!"

"You ought to have thought of it a little sooner. She had one lover, to my certain knowledge, and I believe that he was an accepted one—a penniless young fellow named Labardie, whom I have good reason for disliking. It is probable that she has gone off with him, and that she is hiding somewhere in the town."

"If she was a thousand miles away, in the mountains, I might hunt for her; but I can't nose the plainest track on these streets."

"Perhaps I can find her, Barteau. Indeed, I have no doubt that I can; for I can follow a trail in the city, as easily as you can on the plains. Can you stay in the city a day or two longer?"

"I reckon I ken, if that's a chance to git the gal. I've got a few shiners on hand, that I meant to spend on her, and they will kerry me along for a while, unless I run ag'inst a game of monté."

"Stay here three days, then, and I will promise to bring your daughter to you before the end of that time, or to tell you where she can be found. I must start immediately, to find the trail, and you must take care of yourself, Barteau, until I see you again."

Musson put away his cards and his paper, and the trapper finished the decanter of brandy without taking it from his lips. They then went out together into the street, where they separated.

Jean Barteau's many vices, as well as his few virtues, were entirely those of the animal. Like most of his class, he was passionately fond of ardent spirits, and was prone to drink to an excess when the wherewithal could be obtained. The quantity of brandy that he had drunk at Musson's room had turned his head, until he was crazy for more, and was ready to join in the wildest revel or the most insane orgie. It must have been a powerful motive that could induce such a man

to refrain from liquor almost entirely, during a period of nearly fourteen years.

After leaving Musson, he went direct to a low suburb of the town, which was principally inhabited by the French portion of the population, and which was a great resort for half-breeds, mountain-men, and hunters and trappers generally. Here he stopped at an old wooden house, where the sound of the violin and the tambourine proclaimed the revelry that was going on within, and boisterous noises indicated that the proceedings were by no means of a quiet character.

Entering this tenement, he found himself in a low and dirty room, smelling villainously of liquor and tobacco, and crowded with a motley mixture of rough-looking men, French, Canadians, half-breeds and Americans, among whom were scattered a few women, who were far from being ornaments to their sex.

Jean Barteau found a number of acquaintances and boon companions in this den, and at once proceeded to satisfy his thirst among them. After an hour of hard carousing, during which his manner rapidly grew wilder and more boisterous, he turned his attention to a monté table in a corner of the room, and commenced betting largely on the favorite game of the mountain-men.

Whether he won or lost, the result of every bet excited him to call for liquor, and the more he drank, the larger became his bets, and the louder and more violent his language.

His gold pieces were rapidly being transferred from his pockets to those of the monté dealer, and he would have been, in trappers' phrase, "cleaned out, boss and beaver," if his attention had not been arrested by a new-comer, who laid a hand on his shoulder, and called him by name.

The trapper turned his flushed face from the gambling table, and saw at his side a man in the undress uniform of an officer of the army, a tall and stately gentleman, whose scattered gray hairs showed that he had passed the noon of life, but who was still stout, hearty and well-preserved.

"I reckon you've got the 'vantage of me somehow, stranger," said Barteau, as he pushed the tangled hair from his eyes. "'Pears like I've seen you somewhar afore now, but I can't name the time or place."

"Is your memory so short, Jean Barteau, or have I changed so much since you last saw me?" asked the officer. "I am called Major Henning, and I hope you have not forgotten me."

"I know you well enough, now!" exclaimed the trapper, as a strange gleam shot from his fiery eyes. "I had good reason to know you while you war a capt'in, and it ain't likely that I will ever forget you quite."

"Do you mean to say that you remember that old grudge against me?"

"I hain't forgot it, sir. A man who is tied up and flogged is mighty apt to remember it, 'specially if thar is Injin blood in him, as thar is in me."

"You know, Barteau, that the punishment was for desertion, and that I was obliged to make an example as I did. My duty required it of me, though I wished that I could avoid it, as I told you at the time, remembering your Indian blood, and your natural opposition to restraint. But the example was a necessary one, and it was very beneficial to the command."

"It mought hev done the rest of 'em some good, but it didn't help this child a mite. Jean Barteau ain't of the kind, major, that takes such things easy. I remember it, in course, but I hain't got it laid up ag'inst you. No sir; when a thing is over with, and settled, and paid for, I don't leave a notch ag'inst it on the handle of my knife."

"Settled and paid for! What do you mean by that?"

"Did I say paid for?" laughed the trapper. "Wal, I reckon I didn't mean any thin' partic'lar. I've only got to say that I don't hold any grudge ag'inst you on that score, major. I allow that you want suthin' of me, sir. What mought it be, now?"

"I have a friendly feeling for you, Barteau," replied Major Henning, in a lower tone, "and I am sorry to see you in this den, where, if you remain, you will surely be floeced of all you possess. I was passing through here, looking for a suitable person whom I might employ to act as guide for a party that I am about to send across the plains. You would suit me, I think, if you are not otherwise employed. Suppose we walk out and talk about it."

"Pm willin' enough to have this hyar place, major, for I

know that I've got no call to stay. You don't git any more of these shiners," continued the trapper, turning to the monté dealer. "The sight of gold has made your eyes yaller, but you can't git any more out of this child. I was kinder flustered this mornin', but I ain't drunk enough for that, by thunder! I've got another game on hand, that is apt to pay me better'n yours. As for the guide business, major, I reckon you will hev to look up some other man, and that's plenty to be had. Your way and mine don't foller the same trail, not by a long sight. I'm off, now."

"Not so fast, my friend," persisted Major Henning. "You ought not to decide too quickly on such a matter. The position is a good one, I assure you."

"Good for some, it may be, but not for this child. We part hyar, Major Henning. I can't give you my hand, but I may say that I don't hold any grudge ag'inst you now."

Without another word, Jean Barteau left the house, and walked rapidly down the street. Major Henning looked wonderingly after him for a few moments, and then moved off in the opposite direction.

"It's mighty strange that I should come across that man jist at this time," muttered the trapper, when he was fairly out of sight of Major Henning. "It was so long sence I had set eyes onto him, that I 'lowed he mought be dead. If he thinks he has got the better of me in any way, he is mistaken a heap. It was a good thing that he broke up that game of monté, fur this child was gittin' used up powerful fast. Hope I may be wiped out if I touch another drop of liquor while I stay in this settlement."

Jean Barteau kept his word, and remained sober for two days, when Musson reported to him that Jeannette had gone off with a young man named Henri Labardie, that they had been married by a Catholic priest, and that they had started with a westward-bound train the morning of her disappearance from Madame Pinette's establishment, for a trading-post in the mountains.

In two days more—as soon as Musson could arrange his affairs in St. Louis—he and Barteau were westward bound. The trapper, freed from the taint of the town, was himself again; but the gambler found himself quite out of his element.

## CHAPTER. IV.

### FIVE YEARS AFTER.

**THROUGH** the wind-swept valley of Sangre Cristo creek, a pass through the southern portion of the Rocky Mountains, where that range divides the head-waters of the Arkansas river from those of the Rio Grande del Norte, a small company of travelers were journeying, one stormy evening in November.

The creek which forms the pass winds through a deep cañon, which spreads out, at one point, into a small basin, which is known among mountaineers as the Wind-trap, because the wind blows furiously, at all times of the year, tearing about the inclosure, as if seeking to escape from its imprisonment. The entire cañon is noted for the violence with which the wind rushes through it, making the pass very dangerous in the winter time, when the snow drifts in, filling the hollows to the depth of fifteen or twenty feet.

The party which has been mentioned consisted of two men, a woman, and two children. One of the men, as well as the woman and the children, was entirely unfitted for such a journey, being weak and in delicate health. It was Henri Labardie, who, with his family, was traveling from Santa Fe to St. Louis, under the guidance of a half-breed, named Mathieu. They had started from New Mexico early enough, as they supposed, to enable them to accomplish the most difficult part of their journey before winter should set in; but they had been seriously delayed on the way, and found themselves undertaking the dreaded "jornada" of Sangre Cristo pass, in the midst of a terrible snow-storm.

Henri Labardie looked as if his life had been one of care and trouble since he carried off Jeannette Barbeau from Madame Pinette's boarding-school in St. Louis. The prospect before him, as he toiled up the steep and gloomy cañon, in the face of the chilling wind and the driving snow, was not calculated to make him appear bright or cheerful; but there was a pleasant smile on his red and pale countenance, which

was intended, perhaps, to raise the spirits of others, rather than to express his own feelings. On the saddle before him he carried a bright-eyed little girl, some four years old, who, well wrapped up from the storm, made no complaint, but kept her wistful gaze upon her father's face.

Jeannette Labardie carried in her arms a little boy, her youngest child, hugging him closely to her breast. Matthieu, the guide, rode in front to find the way, and was followed by four pack-mules, after which came the little family, for whom a passable way was thus beaten.

Silently they toiled up the rugged ascent, scarcely a word being spoken by any of the party, until Matthieu halted, as it was getting dusk, and said that they had better encamp where they were, as they would find no better location by going further.

The guide may have been somewhat influenced by the fact that a few blades of coarse grass could be discovered peeping through the snow on the hillside. This might afford some little sustenance to the animals, but there was no chance of comfort for human creatures.

Matthieu and Henri Labardie dismounted and unpacked the mules, after digging a place in the snow where the packs could be kept from rolling down-hill. By the greatest exertions they procured a little wood, enough to cook a sort of analogy for supper, but not enough to give any promise of warmth.

Their scanty supper finished, they laid down by the packs, and endeavored to sleep. Henri Labardie and Jeannette made their children as warm as possible, regardless of their own comfort, and thus they passed the long night, between sleeping and waking, exposed to the peltings of the pitiless storm, and longing for the coming of day. The wind, which rushed down the cañon like a torrent, would every now and then tear the frozen covering from their bodies, chilling them to the bone. The animals, too cold to eat, sought such scanty shelter as they could find, turned their heads from the blast, and stood and shivered through the night.

In the morning Matthieu and Henri Labardie were early astir, and exerted themselves to make a fire for the benefit of Jeannette and the children. They then led the mules to

where they could find pickings of the coarse mountain-grass, and allowed them to feed for an hour or so, before attempting the passage of the Wind-trap.

There was no lull in the storm when they set out; but they knew that they must go through the pass before night, if they could ever get through, and they packed the mules and started forth boldly, if not hopefully.

They found the passage of the little valley toilsome in the extreme, and Jeannette and the children were often in danger as well as in difficulty. Matthieu was obliged to dismount and beat a path through the drifts with his body, and the animals were falling and sinking in the hollows every little while, rendering a great deal of labor and loss of time necessary for their extrication.

By the time they reached the end of the basin, Henri Labardie was almost completely exhausted, and their difficulties were not then at an end. They rested here a little while before commencing the short but steep ascent that separated them from the valley on the other side of the mountain.

Matthieu on foot, and drawing his horse after him by the bridle, led the way; but it was almost impossible for the mules to follow him up the hill, so deeply was it covered with snow, and so wearied were they by their previous labors. At last, however, they struggled up to the top, where they found themselves on a level plateau, from which they had a full view, if not a pleasant one, of the country on all sides of them. To the northward lay the rugged heights of the Rocky Mountains, the white head of Pike's Peak towering far above the rest. Toward the south-east rose the twin Spanish Peaks, and at the east the mountains gradually sloped down until they mingled with the vast expanse of desolate prairie, that stretched, covered with clouds of dust, as far as the eye could see.

It was impossible to rest here; for the wind swept over the level plateau almost as fiercely as through the Wind-trap below, and such strong blasts came at intervals, that men and animals could hardly withstand their force. Besides, the day was drawing to a close, and they were sure that it would be nothing less than death to remain another night in that exposed situation.

The descent of the east side of the mountain was nearly as difficult as their journey through the pass had been, and much more dangerous; for the route lay through a forest of pines, down an abrupt slope, thickly covered with snow. The descent, also, was so broken, filled with snow-covered chasms and ravines, and the darkness among the dense pines was so intense, that they might well pause and shrink from the task before them.

There was no trail to be discovered, of course, as it was entirely concealed by the snow; but Matthieu knew where it ought to run, and suggested that he had better go first, and lead the way as usual, leaving the pack-mules to follow him, and Henri and Jeannette to bring up the rear.

Henri Labardie, who had been surveying the gloomy prospect before him with his usual sad smile, and speaking pleasantly to his little Annette, assented to this suggestion, and turned around to take the place assigned to him.

As he did so, an unusually strong blast of wind swept across the plateau, and his horse, becoming frightened, suddenly rushed madly down the slope. The eyes of the others were so blinded by the wind and snow, that they could not see the course taken by the affrighted animal, that dashed and plunged through the drifts down the steep acclivity, until at last it rolled and tumbled over and over, into a deep chasm filled with snow. Nothing more could be seen, but a whirling cloud of snow, that arose from the place where the horse and his rider were buried.

A wild and despairing shriek came from the lips of Jeannette, as soon as she could get her breath, when she perceived that her husband and child had been snatched from her and hurried to destruction.

"They are gone, Matthieu!" she exclaimed. "My husband and my dear Annette are lost! Let us hasten to save them! For God's sake, lead the way down the hill, and let us look for them!"

"Ve can nossing do, madame," replied the half-breed, shaking his head gloomily. "Zare is but ze von trail, and all oddair vay is but death at zis time. Zey are covair deep by ze snow, and ve lose but ourselves, for zare is no life for ze how or ze man but by ze von trail."

"They must have gone down to the foot of the mountain, Matthieu. Let us hurry down into the valley by the trail, and then we can look for them. There is surely some hope, and we must do all we can to save them."

"Ve might no bettair find ze ring from your fingair. Zey are bofe ripe out—gone bevair—monsieur and zat sweet leetle enfant. It is too bad, sacré enfant de Gârce! Ve vill follow ze trail, madame."

"Lead on then, Matthieu, and lose not a moment, or I shall go distracted."

"Give me, zen, ze leetle boy, and I will take him safe."

"No!" exclaimed the mother, hugging the child more closely to her breast; "he must not leave me. If we die, we must perish together. Lead on, Matthieu!"

The descent of the mountain was accomplished with much difficulty, and, as it appeared to the impatient Jeannette, with a great expenditure of time. When they reached the creek at the foot of the mountain—although she, as well as the animals, was completely exhausted—she at once besought Matthieu to go in search of her husband and child, declaring that she would not stir from the spot until every endeavor was used to find them.

As all expostulation was useless, the half-breed was about to comply with her request, when their hearts were gladdened by the welcome sight of two hunters, who rode into the valley from the eastward. They had heard Jeannette's shriek, and the shouts of Matthieu to the animals as he brought them down the mountain, and had come to see what was the matter.

Jeannette told them of the disappearance of Henri Labardie and Annette, and begged them to join Matthieu in searching for her lost loved ones. When the hunters listened to Matthieu's account of the place and manner of the disappearance, they shook their heads hopelessly, but promised to do all they could. One of them, accordingly, remained with Jeannette, while the other accompanied the half-breed in his search.

It was far in the night when they returned, and they reported that they had not been able to find the slightest trace of the lost ones, who had probably fallen, they said, into some

deep hole in the side of the mountain, where the snow had drifted over them, so as to leave no sign by which they could be discovered.

Jeannette's face was as pale and cold as marble, as she received this intelligence, which bereft her of all hope of the recovery of Henri and Annette. She pressed her remaining child to her bosom, turned away sadly and bore her grief in silence.

The two hunters camped with Matthieu in the valley, where Jeannette and her little boy were made as comfortable as possible; but they again passed a miserable time; for the wind roared and howled along the bed of the creek, rendering it impossible to keep a fire burning, and covering them with snow as they vainly tried to sleep. It seemed to the stricken wife and mother that she could hear the wailing voices of her husband and child in the wind that raved and shrieked about her, and her mental pain was even worse than her bodily discomfort.

Early in the morning, as the violence of the storm had somewhat abated, the mules were packed, and Jeannette and her guide sadly resumed their journey, accompanied by the two hunters.

A few days' travel brought them to a little Indian trading-fort on the Arkansas, where they were kindly received by Major Henning, who was temporarily stationed there with a detachment of troops. As his wife was with him, Jeannette and her child were hospitably entertained and well cared for. When her sad story had been told, Major Henning at once dispatched some men to the place where the accident had occurred, with Matthieu as a guide.

They returned in the course of a week, bringing the body of Henri Labardie, which they had succeeded in finding, after a long and laborious search. Of Annette they had been to find no trace, except some little scraps of her dress were found on the bushes. Their conclusion was, as they did not state it to Jeannette, that the body of the child had been discovered and devoured by the wolves. Jeannette buried her husband near the fort, and thankfully accepted the invitation of Mrs. Henning to remain with her the winter.

## CHAPTER V.

### TEN YEARS MORE.

TEN years had elapsed since Jeannette Labardie lost her husband and her little Annette at Sangre Cristo pass. During all this time she had been an inmate of the household of Major Henning, who, together with his excellent wife, had become greatly attached to her, and treated her as a member of his family. Her life, therefore had been passed in ease and comfort, with nothing to embitter her thoughts except the remembrance of her lost ones who had been so violently taken from her.

During those ten years there had been a large emigration to the far west, and the steps of the pioneer and explorer, as well as those of the hunter and trapper, had penetrated nearly every plain, valley and mountain west of the Mississippi. Oregon was being settled, and the supplies required by the emigrants, as well as by hunters, trappers and Indians, opened a lucrative trade at points far remote from the settlements.

Major Henning had been induced, by the hope of obtaining wealth, to resign his position in the army, and had been for some time in active business as a trader in the mountain districts, furnishing emigrants and mountain-men with supplies, in return for money furs and other articles of traffic. He had established a trading-post at the head-waters of Green river, which, in accordance with his military education, he had fortified, to guard against attacks from Indians or predatory white men. To this position, which he had named Fort Advance, he had brought his family, a short time before the third scene of our story opens.

Jeannette Labardie was now a woman of over thirty years of age; but she was still handsome, notwithstanding the sad and subdued expression that seldom left her fine countenance. She had many admirers, and her hand had been often asked

in marriage; but she remained true to the memory of her beloved husband, and continued to wear her widow's weeds.

We find her seated in a pleasant room in Major Henning's house, within the walls of the fort, engaged in sewing, and in conversation with Mrs. Henning, a gray-haired and matronly lady, whose face shone with kindness and benevolence. In the course of their conversation, Madame Labardie spoke frequently of her son Henri, a fine boy of nearly thirteen years, who had been permitted to go, in company with one of the employes of the post, to a stream under the shadow of the Wind river mountains, to fish for trout.

"I wish he would return," said Madame Labardie, looking anxiously out of the window. "It is now nearly sunset, and he should have been home, according to his promise, an hour ago. I am afraid that something has happened to him."

"You are too nervous and fretful, my dear," replied Mrs. Henning. "Robert Thatcher is a safe hand, and I have no doubt that he will take good care of the boy."

"You can hardly blame me for my anxiety, when you remember that I have lost one child, and that Henri is the only tie that binds me to this world."

"I have had my losses, too, Jeannette, although they have not been as great as yours, for my husband has not been taken from me. I can sympathize with you; but I think that you are unnecessarily troubled about the boy. I heard the gate open just now, and perhaps he and Robert have returned."

At that moment the door of the room was thrown open violently, and Henri Labardie, his fine face glowing with exercise in the pure mountain air, rushed in, and ran up to his mother, whom he kissed affectionately.

He was fancifully dressed in a garb somewhat like that which was generally worn by the free-trappers whom he had met in the wilderness. He had greatly admired the gayly-ornamented hunting-shirts and leggings of these gamecocks of the mountains, and had given his mother no rest until she made him a similar suit.

"Well, mother," he said, as he seated himself on a stool by her side, "I suppose you began to be afraid that I was never coming home. I would have been here an hour ago, if I had not got into a scrape."

"A what, Henri?"

"An adventure, I suppose you would wish me to call it; it was a pretty serious one too, and I am almost afraid to tell it to you, for it looked, at one time, as if this child would be a gone beaver."

"What do you mean by such outlandish talk?"

"I mean that I thought I was going to be rubbed out or toted off; and so I should have been, I reckon, but for a game-bird that lit down in the scrimmage."

"I am as much in the dark as before. You have got the slang of the mountain-men as put as if you had always lived among them. I am very anxious to learn what has happened to you, and I wish you would tell me all about it, in as plain English as you can use."

"I'll try to, mother. You see, Bob Thatcher and I went over to the creek, near the mountains, to catch some trout, and we got a mighty fine string of the beauties. Bob is out cleaning them now, and you shall have them for supper. We were ready to quit, when Bob sighted a buffalo, and put off to try to get the wind of it. I walked on up the creek, to look for some more trout-holes, until I found myself in a kind of gorge near the hills. Just then I caught a glimpse of the prettiest girl, by a long chalk, that I ever laid eyes on. She looked just like a young queen of the woods, and was rigged out in fancy style, I tell you—just as this boss means to have his squaw tricked off when he gets hitched."

"You are talking nonsense, Henri, and you are again using the trappers' slang. I wish that you would speak in proper language, and remember that you are too young to trouble your head about the girls."

"But she was a stunner of a pretty girl, mother, sure as shooting. She had hair as black as yours, and the gayest kind of a head-dress; and her eyes were exactly like yours, big and bright ones. She was standing on a rock when I first saw her, up the stream, a little way above me. I made signs to her, Indian fashion, and she held out her hand and

smiled. The way this child ran to meet her was more like a starved wolf after a wounded deer, than any thing else I know of."

"You are a very precocious child, Henri, and I am sorry to see that your precocity takes such a direction."

"The direction that I took just then was a bee-line for that girl. I supposed that she was an Indian, at first sight; but I soon found out that she was as white as I was, though her face was rather brown, and she spoke as good English as I did, too."

"What did she talk about?" asked Mrs. Henning. "Did you learn who she was?"

"No, ma'am, and that's what makes me mad. I tried to ask her a heap of questions, but she dodged them, and beat me at that game. She asked me my name, and where I came from, and she found out all about me and ma, and all the folks at the fort, in little less than no time. I found out nothing about her, except that her name was Annette, and that she lived in the hills."

"Annette?" exclaimed Madame Labardie, dropping her work. "That was the name of your sister who was lost in the storm. Could you judge how old she was?"

"She looked as if she might be fifteen or sixteen."

"Annette would have been over fourteen, if she had lived. The name is a coincidence, nothing more; for it would have been entirely impossible for Annette to survive the storm in which her father died. What else happened, my son? I am curious to learn what it was that distressed you."

"She had been slowly moving up the creek while we were talking, and I kept by her side, of course. It wasn't long before we were joined by a man, and the mystery of it was, where he came from; for I didn't see him until he was walking on her right hand. He was a rather oldish looking man, with light hair on his head, where it wasn't bald, and a freckled face. He was rigged out in southern style, and looked pretty well; but I didn't like the squint of his eyes a bit. I knew that he couldn't be the girl's father, and I felt shy of him. I stopped, of course, and Annette spoke to him in some language that I didn't understand. I reckon it must have been red-skin lingo. While they talked together he

looked at me mighty sharp, and made me think of a rattlesnake.

"‘I am glad to see you, my brave boy,’ he said, when Annette had finished what she had to say. ‘I am told that you come from Henning’s fort, and that your name is Henri Labardie.’

"‘Yes, sir,’ said I, pretty short

"‘You are a fine boy,’ says the old chap, ‘and your mother must be proud of you, if she is living. Do you like this girl?’

"‘I allowed that she was a mighty nice girl.

"‘Don’t you want to go with us up into the hills, to see where she lives?’ he asked. ‘We will take good care of you there, and you can see as much of her as you want to.’

"‘I told him that I would like to go, some other time; but I had promised my mother to be home early, and must be hurrying back. I said that we would all be glad to see him and Annette at the fort, and that I hoped he would bring her there. Then his face turned pale, all of a sudden, and he looked as if he was right down mad.

"‘I will be there soon enough to suit them,’ he said. ‘There is no use in talking, my boy; I want you, and you must go with me. If you are not willing to go quietly, I shall take you by force.’

"‘I was pretty much riled at that, if I wasn’t a little scared. If I had had a gun or a pistol, I would have taught him to keep his distance; but you won’t let me carry any thing of that kind. I had nothing but my knife, but I pulled that out, and told him he had better let me alone. The girl stood there, looking rather queerish at me, but said nothing.

"‘My knife wasn’t of any use: for he jumped around me just as I would not have expected such an old-looking man to do, and he jerked the knife out of my hand, and caught me by both arms, quicker than you could say Jack Robinson.

"‘I yelled and kicked, as well as I could, and then he told me if I didn’t stop that, he would tie my hands and shut my mouth.

"I didn't stop, for all his threats, and he made them good by tying my wrists with a bit of buckskin and putting a handkerchief over my mouth, so that I could only breathe through my nose. He then tried to march me up the creek; but I wouldn't go; so he tied my feet and took me up in his arms.

"He had just commenced carrying me in this way, when the girl gave a sort of a cry, and ran off like a deer. I wondered what was the matter; but I soon found out, for a fine-looking young chap, with a double-barreled rifle in his hand, stepped out from behind a rock, and asked him what he was doing with me.

"'None of your business,' said he, as cross as an old bear.

"'I make it my business, and I want an answer.'

"'This is my boy, who has run away, and I am taking him home.'

"'That's a lie,' said the jolly young chap. 'I will tell you what you are going to do with him.'

"'What?' asked the man.

"'You are going to put him down there, where you stand, and then you are going to make tracks from here, right away.'

"Old freckle-face did drop me, slap on the hard ground, and then he jerked out a pistol and cocked it; but you just ought to have seen how quick the young chap whirled his rifle around, holding it by the barrel, and knocked that pistol out of his hand.

"'Now' says the young chap, 'if you know what is best for you, you will be making those tracks that I spoke of, without loss of time. If you don't do it, I will knock your head off from your shoulders, as I knocked your pistol out of your hand.'

"'That's a fact,' said another voice; and I looked around, and saw another man standing by the side of the young chap. He was a queer-looking old coon, fixed up like a trapper, and carried a mighty long rifle. 'That's a fact,' says the old beaver. 'You had better take yourself off to'able sudden, for Georgie allers does jest what he says he will do.'

"Old freckle-face looked at them pretty savagely; but he couldn't help seeing that they were too much for him; so he

gave me one of his strange looks, shook his fist, and went off as sulky as you please.

"The young chap then untied me, and took off the handkerchief, and asked me who I was, and where I came from. I told him, after I had thanked him, and he said that he and his friend would go to the fort with me. As we went down the creek, we met Bob Thatcher, who said that he had been looking for me everywhere; but he didn't happen to look in the place where I was."

Madame Labardie, who had been listening to Henri's story with almost breathless interest, drew a long sigh as he concluded, and cast upon him a glance full of affectionate anxiety.

"You must never go in that direction again," she said. "You must never leave the fort alone, and I can not permit you to go anywhere with Robert Thatcher, whom I must always blame for his carelessness in leaving you by yourself. It is plain that you have escaped an awful peril, and I thank God most heartily for his goodness in restoring you to me again. But what became of the young man who freed you from that monster?"

"He came with me to the fort—he and that queer old coon who was with him. I left them outside, with Bob Thatcher, while I hurried in here; for I knew that you would want to see me as soon as I got home."

"Beg them to come in here. Be quick, my son; for I am anxious to thank the man who has rescued my darling boy from such a danger."

Henri took his cap, and started to leave the room; but he was met at the door by Major Henning, who was followed by

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE SON OF A VERY RESPECTABLE FATHER.

MAJOR HENNING was now an old man, as was clearly shown by his snow-white hair and his wrinkled face; but his figure was erect, his form portly, and his air commanding; while his gait and manner indicated that the strength and spirit of his younger days had by no means left him.

Of the two strangers who were with him, one was a young man apparently not over twenty years of age, and the other had evidently passed his life's meridian. The younger one was a handsome fellow, with a ruddy countenance that seemed crowded with good-humor, and twinkling blue eyes that were full of merriment. A pleasant smile played around his lips, and good-nature lurked in the locks of his curling light hair, as well as in every corner of his face; but a close observer could have seen, under all this, evidences of a daring spirit, a resolute will, and an unquenchable energy. He was neatly dressed in a blue flannel hunting-shirt, deer-skin leggings and moccasins, and was armed with a splendid double-barreled rifle, two pistols, and a bowie-knife with richly ornamented hilt and sheath. He was stoutly built, and rather below the medium height; but he carried himself so well, and all his motions were so graceful, that one could hardly have noticed that his form was not perfect.

The older man was very tall and lank, and by no means good-looking. His rough and weather-beaten countenance, discolored with blue stains, and his left eye, which was usually half shut, gave him a singular and unpleasant appearance. His form, too, was angular and big-jointed, and his tangled black hair hung down his shoulders in the most careless profusion. His right eye, however, of the deepest hazel, was very bright, intelligent and penetrating; while his general expression was one of honesty and simplicity. He was roughly dressed, in leather hunting-shirt and leggings, that

were by no means as clean as they might have been, and carried a rifle of enormous length, a hunting-knife, and a short ax, the two latter implements being stuck in his belt.

"Here are some friends whom I found in the fort near the house," said Major Henning, as he entered the room. "It seems, Madame Labardie, as well as I can judge from the account of Robert Thatcher, that your son has had a narrow escape from a great peril. He was met, near the mountains, by a man who would have carried him off, if he had not been rescued by these strangers."

"I know it," said Madame Labardie, rising and advancing toward the young man, who bowed gracefully as he touched the hand she extended to him. "Henri has told me all about it, and I was just blaming him for not having brought to me his brave preserver, that I might thank him as he deserves. I can not tell you, sir, how grateful I feel toward you. I should have had nothing more to lose, if I had lost Henri, and you have saved me, as well as my son."

"It was nothing, madam," answered the young man. "I don't see that I deserve any praise. I was well paid for the little trouble I had, as it was fine sport to me. It was plain that the man lied, that he had no right to the boy, and I wanted to see him *git*, as my friend here would say. The mystery of the affair is, why the fellow should have wanted to carry off your son."

"Mought hev been some old grudge," suggested the elder stranger. "Thar's folks that kerry seek things about untill they die."

"An old grudge?" said Madame Labardie, in a sort of terrified whisper. "What can it have been. Who can have a grudge to satisfy in that way? I will thank you, sir, to describe that man to me, as exactly as you can."

The young stranger gave a very accurate description of the appearance and manner of the bald-headed and freckle-faced man who had attempted the abduction of Henri Labardie. The boy's mother listened with blanched cheeks and trembling lips, and appeared, at the close of the description, to be entirely overcome by some internal emotion.

"Can it be possible," she said, as if speaking to herself,

"that I am again to be followed by trouble, that I must be struck at through my boy? You will excuse me, my friends, if I retire for a few moments, as I am too agitated to remain here at present."

Major Henning offered her his arm, as she rose with difficulty, and escorted her to the door.

"I am afraid there was some truth in your suggestion, my friend," he said, addressing himself to the elder stranger. "Madame Labardie has not told us much of her history; but we know that her life has not been free from trouble. I have had some bitter experience of old grudges, myself. I lost a little girl many years ago, my only child, who was drowned in the Platte, and I have always been inclined to suspect that a deserter from my company, whom I had punished, had something to do with it. But I should not have mentioned it, as my wife is so easily affected by the remembrance. Now my friends, as I hope I may call you, there will be no impropriety, I trust, in asking your names and your business."

"None at all, sir," answered the young man. "My name is George Searle, and I am a Virginian. I do not claim to belong to one of the first families, or to be in any way related to George Washington; but we are a very respectable family at home. In fact we were so excessively respectable, that our respectability was tiresome to me."

"The name of Searle is familiar to me," said Major Henning. "Are you a relative of the Reverend Charles Fauquier Searle, of Dinwiddie county?"

"That very respectable old gentleman has the misfortune to be my father, sir."

"He is a gentleman of the old school. Although I saw him but once, and that a long time ago, I remember that I was highly impressed by his manners."

"They were always very impressive, sir; so impressive, in fact—I say it without disrespect—as sometimes to be tedious to me. I was so deeply impressed by the respectability and solemnity of our house, the attractions of which were not at all increased by the presence of my two maiden aunts, that I felt obliged to leave it for a while, to escape from being bored to death."

"I am happy to be able to claim you as a relative, Mr Searle, although the relationship is a rather distant one. Your father, I believe, is a second cousin of mine."

"You may be sure that he was well aware of that fact, sir. He has a genealogy of the Searle family, which extends to its furthest and minutest ramifications. He gave me a letter to you, saying that I would probably find you at St. Louis, which he believes to be situated at the extreme limit of civilization. I was on my way to this post, when I happened to meet this fine boy."

"I am glad that you have arrived safely. You will need no further introduction to Mrs. Henning, who is rejoiced at meeting a relative here in the wilderness."

Searle bowed to Mrs. Henning, in the courtly style of the "old school," and that lady acknowledged the salutation with her usual grace and affability.

"You must not suppose, major," said the young gentleman, as he resumed his seat, "that I have any real business in this region. I must confess that I am merely traveling for pleasure and excitement, and I find it a very agreeable change from the monotony of home. My careful father furnished me with a letter to a gentleman in St. Louis, who engaged my old friend, here, to act as a sort of bear-leader and tutor during my campaign in the wilderness. His name is Bart Swannick, and he can speak for himself; for he can talk fast enough when he chooses to."

"That's a fact, major," said the old mountaineer. "Georgie is mighty apt to draw a bead on the truth when he shoots his tongue off. I don't believe he would lie, even to an Injin inimy. He is a wonderful clever chap; but I never saw a man who was more set in his own ways. What he says he will do, he is just naterally bound to do, and that's no way of cheatin' or trickin' him off. I am called that Swannick, as he tells you; but my real name, as I've understood it, is Bart-holler-mew. It's a Sempur name, I've heard tell, and it must hev been got up in some place wair folks had plenty of time to talk. It's a good long name, and a big-soundin' one, like some of the Injin handies; but that's most too much of it to tote about in the mountings; so I gin'rally drap all but the Bart."

"I am glad to know you," said Major Henning. "I have heard of you before now, if I have not seen you."

"I am sartin that I hev seen you afore, major, though it was a long time ago—some eighty or forty year, I reckon; but I ain't good at figgers. While I'm talkin', I might as well say that Georgie didn't tell the hull truth about our comin' here. We would hev reached the fort yesterday, if he hadn't been chasin' over the hills arter a gal—a sort of gray gal—the same one, I reckon, that the boy met on the creek. He was powerful eager on the trail, but she allurs managed to give him the slip."

"Indeed! Thatcher did not tell me of the girl. I would like to hear all about her."

Henri Labardie then told his story to the major, and George Searle, being begged to do so, gave some account of his pursuit of Henri's mountain princess, who had easily eluded him whenever he attempted to approach her.

Madame Labardie, who had rejoined the party, listened to both narrations with a painful interest. Major Henning, when Searle had finished his description of the girl, was silent for a few moments, and sat as if buried in thought.

"There is danger abroad," he said at last. "The Blackfeet are on the watch, and they want to surprise and capture this post. What you have told me about the girl, and about that bald-headed and freckle-faced man, has convinced me that the suspicions which I have lately entertained are correct. We may expect a visit from the Blackfeet, and we should lose no time in preparing to meet them."

"I am well puzzled now, major," said George Searle. "What, in the name of wonder, can that beautiful girl have to do with the Blackfeet?"

"Much; but it is a long story, and I can only give you an outline of it at present. There is a large band of Blackfeet, mostly composed of Blood Indians, among whom that bald-headed man and another old man have lived during several years. They have acquired such an influence among the Blackfeet, that the bald-headed fellow has become their principal medicine-man, and his friend, a French Canadian, is a powerful chief. Like most other renegades, these two men are more violent and cruel in their hostility to the whites

than the savages themselves. The home of the band—if they can be said to have a home—is about the head-waters of the Missouri; but they are often on this side of the mountains, and are fond of hovering about the passes, or the valleys in which trapping-parties meet and rest, for the purpose of way-laying unwary travelers, or surprising small detachments. So extensive have been their depredations, and so formidable have they become under the leadership of these white men, that they are known and dreaded far and near, and are shunned even by large and well-organized parties."

"But the girl," interrupted Searle, rather impatiently. "What has she to do with all this? Is that beautiful creature an angel or a demon?"

"Concerning the girl, I have nothing but hearsay to give you, and accounts differ very widely. It is said that she is related to one of the white men, and she is generally supposed to be the daughter of the oldest of them, who is a French Canadian or half-breed. According to some accounts, she is used as a decoy, for the purpose of luring travelers into places where they can be easily destroyed by the Black-feet; but others represent her as more angel than demon, and say that she has been the means of saving many lives. The statements are quite contradictory, and you may believe whichever you choose."

"I shall certainly believe her to be an angel, until I am convinced to the contrary," said Searle.

"I would advise you, however, not to seek too intimate an acquaintance with her, as your belief might be unpleasantly changed. The two white men are known among the Black-feet by Indian names, which signify Gray-head and Bald-head. By the trappers they are usually called Old Frenchy and Old Pison. I have good reason for believing that the bald-headed man is a person who was once known at St. Louis as a gambler and adventurer, under the name of James Masson."

The major's statement was suddenly interrupted by a shriek of terror from Madame Labardie, who fainted and fell from her chair. She was carried to her own room by Major Henning and his wife, and the latter remained with her, while the former, with a troubled countenance, soon returned to the room in which he had left Searle and Swannick.

"She is better," he said, in answer to Searle's inquiries. "It was but a slight fainting-fit, from which she was easily recovered. I am afraid that she has reason to know the name that I mentioned, and that it must be some old grudge, as friend Swannick said, that induced Musson to carry off her son."

"There is some mystery about it, certainly," said Searle. "We may have a chance to learn more about it, if, as you suppose, there is a probability that we will be visited by that band of Blackfeet."

"The probability is a strong one, as I think. This post is situated just in the route which they must take, on this side of the mountains, when they wish to pounce upon passing trains or to reach the favorite hunting and trapping-grounds to the north of us. They have not passed here since I came; but I know that my establishment is a great eyesore to them, and that they would like to destroy it, as well as to get what it is supposed to contain. I have no doubt that they will attack me, if they think themselves strong enough to win the victory."

"What will be your chances in a fight, major? Do you consider yourself strong enough to repulse such a band?"

"I hope they may not discover how weak I am at present. I have only about a dozen fighting men with me, the others being absent on business expeditions. My post is generally called a fort; but, as you may have noticed, it is only laid off as a fort, and not constructed as such. A great deal of labor is needed, before it can be called a defensible position. To-morrow I shall set at work all the men I can spare, in strengthening the defenses, and no suspicious persons must be allowed to enter."

"You may count on two additional men for fighting, as Swannick and I will be here when the tussle comes. For my part, I am anxious to get a closer view of that girl of whom I caught a glimpse in the mountains. I mean to do so, if it is a possible thing, and it ought to be possible, as she is in the neighborhood. Perhaps Bart and I may bring you some information of the enemy."

"I am afraid that you would fall into their hands. Permit me to advise you against such an attempt."

"It would probably be useless, as I am foolishly obstinate. As that man Musson wished to carry off Madame Labardie's boy, it would be but fair to turn the tables on him by bringing him into the fort."

"I wish you could do so; but the attempt is too hazardous."

"It would be too good a joke to be lost. If I don't bring him in, I will bring some of his party, or something that belongs to him."

"That's a fact!" broke in Bart Swannick. "Georgie will do what he says he will, and it ain't worth while to hold out ag'inst him."

Mrs. Henning and Jeannette Labardie now came in, and led the way to another room, where supper was ready.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### SOMETHING BROUGHT IN.

IN one of the deep and narrow valleys of the Wind river mountains, on the western side of that lofty range, two men were seated, one afternoon in July, a few days subsequent to the events recorded in the last chapter.

Far above them, toward the east, towered the snow-covered peaks of the mountains, their tops seeming to reach to the skies and to connect the lower world with that above. On each side were rugged and broken precipices, impossible of access to man or horse. The entrance to the valley was by a narrow defile, through which two horsemen could hardly pass abreast. The valley widened above the entrance, about half a mile from which it terminated, at the foot of a stupendous cliff. At this season it was covered with a rich growth of good grass. Nearly in the middle was a beautiful lake, deep and clear, rock-bound and cold. At the upper end a limpid spring gushed out from the rocks at the foot of the cliff, mingling its waters with those of the lake, and forming one of the sources of the great Colorado river, which empties

ato the Gulf of California. Around the lake were clustered a number of Blackfeet lodges, with men, women and children scattered about among them. The short and stout ponies of the warriors were grazing in the valley below.

The two men who have been mentioned were seated near the spring under the cliff, one reclining on a bearskin, and the other sitting up, straight and still, on a rock.

The latter was the bald-headed and freckle-faced person who has already been described. His companion was an older man, with long, white hair, red face, and form inclined to be portly. His countenance was brutalized, showing the traces of violent passions, and a free use of ardent spirits, and a malevolent disposition peeped out of his small black eyes.

"Well, Barteau, I don't see that I have any thing more to say or do about it," said the freckle-faced individual, rather petulantly. "The matter is in your hands now, and you may take what measures you please."

"In coorse I may, and I've a notion that I will take the measure of Henning's fort afore long. You are sure the boy called himself Henri Labardie, and that he was Jeannette's child?"

"I have told you so. There can be no doubt about the boy, for Annette pumped all his history out of him. He and his mother are living with Major Henning, and have been since—"

"Since we found Annette, down at t'other end of the mountings. That was a lucky hit, Jeems Musson. Hope I may be rubbed out, if I don't believe that good-luck follers one up to'able sharp. Arter chasin' Jeannette and that scamp about fur so long, without ever gittin' a chance to light on 'em, I say it was the best of good-luck to find the gal that in the snow. We war cussin' purty hard, you know, 'cause we had to take up with such a mean campin'-place in the storm; but, if we hadn't happened to be right thar when Labardie came tumblin' down the mounting, we would hev missed a heap. We didn't need even to stick a knife into him, as the hoss had finished him; and the gal was wrapped up so nice and warm, that we had nothing to do but to kerry her along, and tramp out of the way."

"That is true enough," said Musson, with growing impatience; "but it has nothing to do with the present time and business."

"Yes it has; a heap. Jest see how good-luck follers me. We lost the trail of Jeannette, and only heard of her once in ten years; and now, jest when we are well fixed, with men under us and power in our hands, she turns up right afore us. I was to'able well satisfied, myself, 'cause I knew what Annette would grow up to be, and I was sure that I could marry her off to some rich man, by the time I got too old fur work."

"I am afraid that your marriage scheme will prove a failure, like your attempt with Jeannette. But all this is nothing to the purpose. What do you mean to do with your good-luck, as you call it?"

"I mean to marry off Annette, as I said; and that will be a good thing of itself. It will be a good thing, too, to wind up my revenge on that cussed Major Henning, with one big blow that will finish him."

"That is what I want to get at. His fort is full of goods that he brought on this season, and it would be a valuable prize."

"Don't I know it? The Blackfeet are all ready fur the work, too. The durned fort is sot right in thar way, and will be a heap of trouble to 'em if it stays whar it is. They are keen to wipe it out, and to git the spoils and the scalps that belong to it. But we must make a sure thing of it, as you know, Jeems Musson. If we should git whipped, the red-skins would turn ag'inst us at once, and our scalps would come up missin'!"

"There need be no failure, if we show any skill, and if the Blackfeet fight as they ought to. There are but few men in the fort—not more than a dozen, I believe, and the fortifications that Henning has planned are not half finish'd."

"Are you sartin? I' that pint is sure, the thing ont to be easy enough. But I hear the major has set his men at work throwin' up dirt."

"That is true, and it proves that we have no time to lose, as I have been telling you. We must strike soon, if we are to strike at all."

"You are right about that, Jeems Musson. We must speak to Ah-na-mish-co about it right away. I reckon that is him, comin' up from the lake, with a crowd of red-skins around him. Suthin' has happened, sartin. Ah! here is Annette, ridin' as if she wanted to break her neck."

Up the valley, mounted on a spirited pony, which she rode without a saddle, and with a leather thong about its neck instead of a bridle, came a beautiful girl, galloping at full speed. Young as she was, she had the appearance of a woman and the air of a princess. Her features were perfect, and it was doubtful whether her complexion was injured by the warm tints that it had taken from the sunshine and breezes of the wilderness. Her abundant black hair was neatly braided, and crowned with a fanciful head-dress of feathers. She wore a braided red flannel sack, under which was a long garment of dressed fawnskin, richly embroidered, and girded at the waist. Her moccasins, also, were gayly ornamented, and reached high up the ankle.

She suddenly brought her pony to a stand in front of the two old men, who looked at her with admiring eyes.

"What's the matter, Annette?" asked Barteau. "You look as if you had been ridin' a race, and I've a notion, from the sparkle of your eyes, that somebody must hev been contrairyin' you. Is thar any row among the red-skins? What is bringin' them up this a-way?"

"It's a prisoner," answered the girl. "He is my prisoner, by right, and Red Wolf says that he means to murder him. I tell him that he shall do no such thing; but he vows that he will. At last he agreed that he would bring him to you before he killed him, and I want you to let him know that he must mind me."

"Of course he must, beauty. The chief must hev been mighty mad, if he wouldn't mind you without a word from me. What sort of a prisoner is he?—a white man?"

"Yes sir; the same young man who—"

"Enough said, gal. You mean the same good lookin' young chap who was follerin' you about a few days ago. I mought hev put a bullet in him easy; but I knew he would come up afore long, and there's no tellin' what a speculation ther may be in him."

"What do you mean, father Barteau?"

"We'll see, my gal. P'raps he's rich, and it will pay better to bleed his pocket than his veins. Here comes Ah-na-mish-co, bringin' him up. I will hev a talk with him, gal, and will see that the chief don't hurt him."

The next moment a tall and fine-looking Blackfoot came up to the spring, attended by two warriors and a number of women and children. He was leading, as a captive, no less a person than George Searle, who had thus fulfilled his promise to bring James Musson, or something that belonged to him, into Henning's fort.

The hands of the young gentleman were bound behind his back, and his weapons had been taken from him; but his air was bold and defiant, and he did not appear to be in the least disconcerted at finding himself in such an unpleasant situation. In fact, as he looked at Annette, his eyes brightened, and a glad smile lighted up his countenance.

"What have you here, Ah-na-mish-co?" asked Barteau, as he signed to the Indian to be seated.

"A white man, as the Gray-haired chief can see," replied the Blackfoot, addressing Barteau by his Indian name. "I mean to burn him and to take his scalp; but the Snow Bird says that he must not be hurt."

"Well, I hope you don't mean to go ag'inst what the Snow Bird says. You are allers mighty ready to mind her talk—too much so, 'cordin' to my notion."

"This white man has slain two of my warriors. Their blood calls for vengeance, and their wives and children will not be satisfied unless he is put to death."

Annette glanced angrily at the chief, and spoke up quite sharply.

"The warriors had no business to meddle with him. If they had let him alone, they would not have been killed. He was my prisoner, and I was bringing him into the valley when they set upon him."

"That is as true as gospel," said George Searle, with a merry laugh. "I was the prisoner of her bright eyes, if I was not the captive of her bow and spear. I was willing to follow her wherever she chose to lead."

"You were not following me, and you know it," pettishly

replied Annette. "I was driving you, and you know that I would have shot you if you had tried to run. The Red Wolf can not say, father Barteau, that his warriors had any right to interfere with my prisoner."

"The Snow Bird is right," said Musson. "The warrior had no right to touch the man; he was really her prisoner. That is a question that must be investigated. Let the women and children be sent away, Red Wolf, and let us speak to this man. We will see to it that he does not escape."

The red rabble were accordingly dispersed, and Searle was confronted by the two old men and the Blackfoot chief. Annette dismounted from her pony, and seated herself on the grass near the group.

"Who are you, stranger; and what do you come from?" asked Barteau.

"Searle is my name, if that will do you any good," replied the young man.

"We know that," interrupted Musson. "Your name is George Searle, and you are the son of Charles Fauquier Searle, of Dinwiddie county, Virginia. He is a gentleman of means, and you are traveling for pleasure."

The young gentleman was startled, and wondered whether these bandits of the mountains could have spies in the fort, who had overheard his conversation with Major Henning; but a second thought struck him.

"If you have found the letter case that I lost in the hills a few days ago," said he, "I will thank you to hand it over to me."

"You are a tofable peart yez-zig chap," said Barteau, with a grin, "and I've a notion that you wouldn't hev been took prisoner by the gal, unless you had wanted to be took. Your father is a rich man, I am told, and you are his only son."

"You seem to know as much about the matter as I do, if not more."

"Wal, I shall want to hev a talk with you afore long; but I've got partic'lar business on hand jest now. I must look into that claim that the chief, here, has got ag'inst you, too. Ah-na-mish-co, s'pose you call a couple of your men to take keer of this chap, and lodge him in the cave fur a while."

Two warriors were called, who took Searle by the arms, and

led him off to another part of the valley. Annette remained seated on the grass, gazing after the prisoner, until she was told that a council was about to be held, at which her presence was not required. She then walked slowly down toward the lake, leading her pony, and apparently occupied by perplexing thoughts.

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## CHAPTER VIII

### DRIVEN FORTH.

THE morning after George Searle's introduction into Henning's fort, the major set at work all the men who could be spared from other important duties, to strengthen the works that were intended for the defense of his fort. He did not attempt to disguise the anxiety that he felt concerning the large band of Blackfeet who were known to be in the vicinity. He knew that their mode of warfare was only by ambush, surprise and sudden assault, and that they were not wont to attack the fortified positions or camps of the white man; but he also knew that his fortifications were weak; that his force was small and largely outnumbered by the enemy; that the stores collected at the post were a prize for which they would be willing to run a great risk; and that the organization and military habits of the Blackfeet must have been greatly improved by the white men who had acquired control over them.

He had reason to suspect, also, that spies from the Blackfeet had gained access to the post, who had informed their leaders of the weakness of the little garrison and of the condition of the works of defense. He knew that this must be the case, because one of his employes had lately wounded and captured a Blackfoot, who boasted, just before his death, of the knowledge that the band possessed, and declared that they would soon take the fort and the scalps of its inmates.

After the departure of Searle and Swannick, therefore, strict orders had been given that no one should be allowed to enter the inclosure who was not well known, and that all

Indians and strangers should be examined first by the major or his principal clerk. The worthy old gentleman had been sorry to see his two new acquaintances leave him so soon, and had endeavored to dissuade them from their enterprise; but Searle was not to be dissuaded, being confident that he would soon return, and that he would bring back important information, if nothing more. The major was by no means so confident, but feared that he would only lose two valuable auxiliaries, who might be useful in the coming crisis.

There was another matter that troubled Major Henning not a little. The attempted abduction of Henri Labardie by one of the Blackfeet, and the great agitation of the boy's mother, when she heard the supposed name of that man, were circumstances which seemed very mysterious to him, and which were as yet entirely unexplained.

Jeannette told but little of her history to her kind friends. In fact, they knew scarcely any thing of her past life, except that her husband had been for a long time in delicate health, and that he, together with her eldest child, had perished in that terrible snow-storm, at the head of Sangre Cristo pass. During the past few days the major had become convinced that there was some dark mystery connected with his protégé, and he could only conclude that she was suffering from the consequences of some error, if it was not a crime, of her earlier days.

There was a slice of suspicion in his nature, which had not been lessened by years of contact with treacherous savages and deceitful white men. When his suspicions concerning Jeannette had sprouted, if we may use the expression, they grew rapidly, and he became very desirous that the matter should be investigated, and that the real cause of her agitation should be made known.

Feeling that such an investigation would be too delicate a task for himself to undertake, and being, at the same time, rather ashamed of his suspicions, he requested his wife to sound Madame Labardie on the subject, to endeavor to learn her history, and to find out, in particular, what had caused her to appear so troubled when the name of James Munson was mentioned.

That good lady, however, not being a sharer in her

husband's suspicions, was by no means inclined to do any thing that could cause Madame Labardie the least uneasiness. She loved Jeannette as a mother would love a daughter, and was always tender and affectionate in all her dealings with her. It was not to be supposed, therefore, that she would be very searching in her inquiries, or that she would endeavor to probe Jeannette's wound when she discovered that the treatment was painful to her. Jeannette's answers to the questions that were hinted at, rather than asked, by the kind old lady, were mainly composed of tears, and of entreaties that she would let the subject drop, as it would only uselessly revive unpleasant recollections. Jeannette could solemnly assure her, she said, that there was nothing wrong connected with her past life; but there were circumstances which she desired to be buried in oblivion, and which she would gladly forget, if she could.

She confessed that she had run away with Henri Labardie, because her father had sought to marry her to a man whom she hated and despised—to a man named James Musson, who was probably the same man whom Major Henning had mentioned as one of the leaders of the Blackfoot band.

That man, she said, had greatly annoyed her husband and herself, in past years, and she was afraid that he might cause her further trouble when he discovered her whereabouts. She felt herself safe, however, under the protection of her kind friend, Major Henning, and she only wished that the subject might be dropped, as it was very painful to her.

Major Henning was by no means satisfied with this information, as his wife communicated it to him. He thought that she might have pressed Madame Labardie more closely, and might have drawn from her something more definite. He did not say so, however, but shook his head gravely, and went to attend to his duties.

Affairs remained in this situation for three days after the departure of Searle and Swannick, when there was a new occasion of excitement at the post.

The Blackfoot had lately made their appearance so near the fort, and in such numbers, that Major Henning had sent out no more hunting-parties, and had allowed no one to leave the inclosure, except two of his best scouts. He was not

surprised when two mounted and painted Indians made their appearance, bearing a white rag on the point of a lance, which was doubtless intended as a flag of truce.

This proceeding was so different from the usual customs of the savages, that he supposed it must have been arranged by the white leaders of the Blackfeet, and that the object was to demand the surrender of his post.

The result proved that this conjecture was partly right and partly wrong. The Indians were received outside of the fort, where they delivered to him a well-written letter, which he read as follows :

“ TO MAJOR HENNING, commanding trading-post in Green river valley :

“ As you must be aware, a large band of Blackfeet warriors are encamped near your station. I am one of the leaders of that band, and can assure you that their numbers and their bravery are such that they are able to capture your fort and all it contains. They are eager to do so, and have only been restrained, thus far, by my influence. I am still willing to restrain them, if you will make such reasonable terms as I propose. You have with you, under your protection, a woman who calls herself Jeannette Labardie, but who is really my wife, having left me years ago, in company with a young man named Labardie. I demand that she be given up to me, and her father, Jean Barteau, who is here with me, joins in the demand. If it is complied with, and if you are willing to send me a sufficient quantity of powder and lead, alcohol, blankets and other articles, to be divided among the Indians at present, your post will not be molested; otherwise, I will let my warriors loose upon it. If you knew as much about the woman as I do, you would be glad to send her away. I have exact information of the number of your men, the strength of your defenses, and all particulars connected with your station and its contents. You will perceive, therefore, that I am making you a liberal offer, and I have no doubt that you will be wise enough to send back by the bearers your acceptance of my terms.

“ JAMES MUSSON,

“ Otherwise known as the Bald Chief.”

Major Henning's feelings on reading this missive were those of astonishment and indignation. Here, then, was the solution of the mystery that had lately troubled him. Jeannette Labardie, as pure, good and saintlike as she had appeared, was a woman who had left her husband, and had

taken up with another man. Worse—her real husband was a gambler and adventurer of the worst kind, and her father was a mountaineer of bad character, who had been flogged as a deserter. Worse, still—her husband and her father were chiefs of a plundering and murdering band of savages, who were even then seeking an opportunity to destroy his trading-post, and to take the lives of his family and his friends. It was no wonder that this woman refused to tell her history, that she desired a curtain to be dropped over her past life.

The major did not doubt the truth of what Musson said with regard to the information possessed by the Blackfeet; for he had lately had abundant reason to believe that they knew all that was going on in the fort. A harsher suspicion than he had yet entertained now crossed his mind. Could it be possible that this wicked woman, who had so long remained, under false pretences, an inmate of his family, had been acting as a spy for the white leaders of the savages who were threatening his safety? He quickly concluded that it was not only possible but highly probable.

The first thing to be attended to, however, was to give an answer to the communication that he had just received from Musson. He could not, as a gentleman and a soldier, turn over Jeannette to the mercies of Musson and his partner, whatever might be her relations to them, or whatever fault she might have committed. Neither did he have any idea of giving up his goods to make presents to the savages; for it was against his principles to attempt to buy off an enemy, and he was by no means sure that Musson would be able to keep his promise, even if he should desire to do so.

After a brief consideration, he told the Indians that he had no answer to return to such a communication, except that it would be necessary for them to come and take the fort if they wanted it. With threatening language and insulting gestures, the envoys rode away.

Major Henning immediately went to his house, in a very disturbed and perplexed state of mind. He was angry, and was not disposed to bottle his wrath.

In the sitting-room he found his wife and Madame Labardie, engaged, as usual, in sewing and conversation.

Jeannette trembled and turned pale, when she saw that he was in a towering passion, and her panic was heightened when he opened the letter that he had received from Musson, and read it in loud and angry tones.

The effect upon Jeannette was terrible. She was so filled with grief and fear at this unexpected revelation, that her face turned to the hue of ashes, and she would have fainted and fallen from her seat, if Mrs. Henning had not brought her some water and produced a bottle of smelling-salts.

Major Henning, without appearing to notice her condition, turned and addressed her in the same rough and angry tones which he had used while reading the letter.

"I wish to know what this means, madam; I received this paper a short time ago, from the hands of two Blackfoot Indians, and I have a right to demand from you a full and truthful explanation. You have been with us a long time, and we have endeavored to treat you with invariable kindness and affection; but I am afraid that we have been poorly repaid by you. You have never told us your history, and we have never wished you to do so against your will. It now seems that you had good cause for concealment. It was natural that you should not wish the facts to be known, if it be true, as is stated in this paper, that your father and your rightful husband are the renegade and rascally leaders of that murderous band of savages. I am waiting for your explanation, madam."

Poor Jeannette could hardly find utterance, much less say what she might have wished to say, if her trouble had not been so great. She cast a piteous look upon Mrs. Henning, an imploring glance toward the major, and spoke feebly and painfully:

"I hardly know what to say. I am afraid you would not believe any thing I might say. I hoped that this trouble had ceased to follow me; but it finds me out wherever I go. That man is not my husband, and never was. I knew him once, but knew him only to despise and fear him. Since my marriage he has persecuted me, and I fear that he will never cease to do so while he lives. I have never been the wife of any man but Henri Labardie, my dear

husband, and the father of my child. He is dead, and I have now no protector but God, since you are angry with me."

"You deny one of the allegations contained in this paper," resumed Major Henning, whose manner was not at all mollified. "Do you also deny the other? It tells me that your father, in connection with this man, is one of the Blackfeet leaders."

"I can only tell you the truth, sir, and you must judge for yourself. I knew nothing about my parentage until I was seventeen years of age. I was educated at a boarding-school in St. Louis, and only knew that money was received for my support. At last, a very rough and ignorant person appeared, named Jean Barteau, who claimed to be my father, and said that he intended to take me away, and that he meant to marry me to a rich man, by whom he could be supported in ease during the remainder of his life. He mentioned the name of James Musson as the man he had chosen—a person of bad character, for whom my only feeling was dislike. I could not believe that Jean Barteau was my father; I could not believe that any father could wish to treat his child so cruelly; but I feared that I would be forced into the marriage, and I fled from him with Henri Labardie, to whom I was married before we left St. Louis. We were followed, wherever we went, and were persecuted during five years, when my husband and daughter perished, and I found a refuge with you. This is the whole truth, sir, before God. If I have done wrong, you may judge me."

"A very strange story," said Major Henning, with something like a sneer—"a very strange story, such as is not often told except in works of fiction. Supposing it to be true, I am compelled to ask why you did not make it known to us long ago?"

Jeannette did not answer. It was through shame that she had not told her story; shame that she should be known as the child of Jean Barteau; shame that she should have been in any way connected with such a man as James Musson. Major Henning did not appreciate this reason, and his conclusion from her silence was, that she had just trumped up a story for the emergency.

"As it seems to be inconvenient for you to answer, I will not press the question," said he. "I have known, for some time, that the Blackfeet have had full information of every thing that has transpired at this post. As the leaders of those savages claim to be closely connected with a person in my family, a reasonable man might conclude that they had derived their information from that person."

"Major Henning!" exclaimed his wife, in a tone of indignant protest, while Jeannette again seemed ready to sink upon the floor.

"You must not interfere in this business, Mrs. Henning," continued the major. "I am responsible for the lives of all at this post, as well as the property it contains, and I must do what my duty tells me to do. I will say to that person that I have not entirely adopted the conclusion to which I alluded; but this matter is not explained to my satisfaction. It will be my duty, therefore, to send her to the States, as soon as I can find a safe escort going thither, as I consider that she ought not to remain in my family or at this station."

"You have left me no answer," gasped Jeannette. "I can say nothing against your decision. Do with me as you will. Mrs. Henning I hope that you will now permit me to retire to another room. Do not follow me, I entreat you; I must bear this alone."

The night following the day on which this unpleasant scene occurred, saw Jeannette Labardie and her son leave the fort unperceived, and hasten eastward across the wild and lonely plains.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A MIXED JOKE.

"THERE are some jokes that are good jokes, and there are others that are not so good," thought George Searle, as he left the presence of Barteau and Musson, escorted by two Black-foot braves.

"For instance," the thought continued, "I considered it a very good joke when I allowed that wild young beauty to capture me, and when I went with her for the purpose of seeing where she would go to. Just now it seems to be a bad joke to find myself a prisoner among those murdering Blackfeet, with no present prospect of regaining my liberty, and a fair chance for losing my life. It was a good joke, I thought, when I slipped off from Bart Swannick to follow the girl, and hid my trail so well that he could not find it; but I am inclined to think that the cream of the joke is in his cup now. I came, I saw, and I did not conquer—that appears to be the difficulty. However, I must make the best of it, and I will never cry while I can laugh; no day is ended until the sun sets, and even then twilight comes before dark. Who knows but I may yet, by some sleight of hand, turn the tables on these people, and have something worth laughing at? I wonder what the Reverend Charles Fauquier Searle would say if he could see me in this predicament. His respectable nose would turn up in holy horror at beholding his son in such disreputable company."

The reflections of the young gentleman were stopped by the arrival of his guards at the cave to which they had been directed to convey him. This was simply a hole in the rock, at the foot of the cliff, which formed the upper or eastern boundary of the valley. The entrance was small, and the interior was limited in size; but its natural condition had been changed, to some extent, by the hand of man, and it would have formed quite a comfortable little dwelling-place, if there had not been a deficiency of light and

Into this place George Searle was thrust without any ceremony. The bonds were removed from his hands, and he was left alone to resume his meditations, while the young warriors mounted guard at the entrance of the cave.

He had been there about two hours, and was beginning to feel hungry—for the day was nearly spent, and he had had no dinner—when the opening was darkened for a few minutes, and the burly form of Jean Barteau, after a few muttered oaths, was squeezed through it into the cave. Searle rose to meet his visitor; but the ex-trapper seated himself on a rock, and motioned the young man to be seated.

"I hev come to see you, young man," said Barteau, "to take a look at you, and to ax you some questions."

"Look as much as you please, old beaver, and ask as many questions as you want to," replied Searle. "You seem to be a hearty old fellow; but it is my opinion that I can answer as many questions as your wind will hold out to ask."

"It will be worth your while to answer 'em in a straight-forred and decent fashion, too. In p'int of fact, it will be wuss for you if you don't answer 'em to suit me."

"Truth is mighty, and will prevail—in the end; but it can't bring a dead man to life. Surge ahead, old gentleman, and I will do my little uttermost."

"In the fust place, young chap, thar's a to'able heavy charge ag'inst you here, and I want to get at the rights of it. It seems you've been killin' a couple of Injins, and the chief, Red Wolf, is mighty hot about it. P'raps you don't know that that is wuss'n a hangin' matter among the Black feet."

"I know that killing a man in self-defense is not regarded as a hanging matter in civilized countries, whatever it may be among savages."

"It's a serious business, I say, and you had better be keeful how you answer. What I want to git at is this—whether Snow Bird tuck you prisoner, or—"

"Is her name Snow Bird?" interrupted Searle. "I thought it was Annetta."

"Her right name is Annette, but the Injins call her Snow Bird. Jest you stop interruptin', and tell me whether you war really Annette's prisoner, and what the red-skins tried to do to you or her."

This was, indeed, a serious matter, as Searle well knew; for it affected his life. He paused, therefore, before committing himself to an answer.

Snow Bird had been right in claiming that she had taken him captive, and he had been right in thinking that his captivity to her was voluntary. Both were right, and both were wrong. It was true that he had been marching before her, that he turned his steps in whatever direction she told him to take, and that she kept him covered by a light carbino which she held in readiness to fire; but it was also true that he held in his hand a double-barreled rifle, which he might have used if he had wished to, and that he was not at all influenced by fear of the weapon that was carried by the girl.

It was necessary, however, that he should make it appear that he had really been captured by Annette, as that fact might determine whether he should live or die. He had heard it decided that, according to the law of the wilderness, the Blackfeet had no right to interfere with him if he was the prisoner of Snow Bird. If they had no right to interfere with him, he was justified, even according to savage law, in killing them. In view of these facts, therefore, he framed his answer carefully.

"It is true, old gentleman, without a doubt," he said, "that I was the prisoner of that beautiful young creature whom the red-men call Snow Bird—and she looks as pure, by Jove! as if she might have been formed from the snow, as clear and bright as the icicle that hangs on the north-west wing of Diana's temple."

"Drap that!" grumbled old Barteau.

"It is true, my unpoetical old beaver, that I was Annette's captive. You can have no doubt of that when I inform you that she marched behind me with a cocked fusce, driving me along, as she expressed it, and ordering my goings, as the Reverend Charles would say. I was subject to her orders and obedient to her bidding; for I felt that my heart and my life were in her hands. She told me to march, and I marched; to go,

and I wenteth; to do this and that, and I did this, y and thatly. To be sure, she had omitted to take my rifle from me; but it was wholly at her service, with every thing else that belonged to me."

"How did she happen to take you?" asked Barteau, who was impatient at this rignmarole.

"Smitten by her beauty, my unworthy friend, I was determined to have an interview with her. Unable to meet her by moonlight alone, in a civilized manner, I sought her at daylight and in the mountains. I found her; but soon perceived that I might as well chase an eagle on the wing, as attempt to catch the Snow Bird. She flew hither and thither, before me and about me, now visible and again invisible, but always uncatchable, until I took a seat on a rock, and devoted a few moments to rest and meditation. Then I caught sight of her again, as she started up from the ground near me, with her fusce leveled at my innocent head. She ordered me to surrender, and I surrendered at discretion, rather than have the rocks covered with my valuable brains. She directed me to march along before her, and said that she would speak with me if I would go where she wished me to go. I obeyed, and we went on in that fashion, until we came in sight of two savages, who immediately sprung upon me with tomahawks and knives. I shot the first through the head and the second through the heart, and you ought to have seen how surprised the fellow looked when he discovered my gun could shoot twice without being loaded. It was the best joke I have had lately."

"Drap that!" growled Barteau.

"Before I could look around, or think of any thing else, I found myself surrounded by half a dozen Blackfeet, who threw me down, disarmed me, and tied my hands in a few seconds of time. Among them was this old fellow who brought me to you, and I verily believe that he would have murdered me in cold blood, if it had not been for Annette, who talked to him as if she ought to be obeyed."

"So she ort. She's a creetur as has a will of her own. 'Peep like you've tuck a rather strong notion to that gal, stranger."

"If I had not been anxious to see her and speak with her,

I would not have followed her, and would not have been caught in this scrape."

"She's a mighty fine gal, stranger."

"I think so. Are you her father, sir?"

"Not adzackly. I call myself her dad; but I'm her grand-dad, in pint of fact. I am told, young chap, that you are the son of a rich man in old Verginny."

"I belong to a very respectable family, sir—almost too respectable, in fact, for the rough and tumble of this wicked world."

"As your father is a rich man, I allow that you must be tofable rich yourself, or expect to be."

"I am reasonably well off, old beaver, in the treasures of this world, and they are as yet uncorrupted by moth or rust. If I should continue to live, and some very respectable people of my acquaintance should conclude to die, I will have a sufficiency of earth's pomps and vanities to support a small family in ease and comfort."

"I can't adzactly level my sight onto all you say, young chap; but ease and comfort—that's the thing, 'specially in old age. How was it that you happened to come out into these hyar mountings?"

"I did not *happen* to come, my inquisitive friend; but came with a deliberate design, and of my own free will and accord."

"But what the thunder sent you hyar?"

"It was not thunder that sent me, but, rather, the lack of it. The atmosphere of my very respectable home was so oppressively tranquil, that I longed to face a storm by way of variety. Our style of civilization was so deuced dull, that I concluded to seek relief among the barbarians. My respected progenitor, the Reverend Charles, asked me the same question, although he did not mention thunder in that connection, and I will tell you the conclusion at which he arrived. He said that I could not be going to the west to get riches, as I had enough at home; I could not be going for the purpose of learning, as there were plenty of books that would tell me all about the country and the people. In fact, there was no good or useful end that could be served by the journey, and he could only conclude that the devil had put the idea into

my head—that the devil wished to drive me away from the respectable influences of my home. If the old gentleman was right—and he must have been—I think the devil ought to help me out of all the scrapes I get into.”

More than half of the young gentleman’s “palaver” might as well have been Greek, as far as Jean Barteau’s comprehension was concerned; but he understood enough of it to know that his prisoner had come into the wilderness because, as the ex-trapper would have expressed it, he “durn pleased to.”

“And now, my predatory old beaver,” continued Searle, “as I have answered so many of your questions, I must ask you one in return. When do these red-skinned savages propose to roast and eat me?”

“Wal, it is jest possible, young chap, that you mought git along without bein’ roasted, if you are willin’ to fall in with my notions. You will allow, I reckon, that bein’ married is a better business than bein’ roasted.”

“Sometimes it is, I admit; but there might be instances in which I would prefer the roasting. A few minutes of quick fire would be preferable to a lifetime of hot water. If, however, I could marry to suit myself—such a person, in fact, as the beautiful creature who is sometimes called Snow Bird—”

“That’s the idee, stranger. She is a mighty fine gal, and is all she ort to be, ‘ceptin’ in p’int of eddication. She is young yit, but will soon be old enough to marry. I want to marry her to a rich man, who will be able and willin’ to keep me in ease and comfort until I die. If you want to marry Annette on those thar terms, you may hev her; if you don’t want to, I must turn you over to the red-skins, who don’t make any sech bargains.”

“You offer me strong inducements,” replied Searle. “Life and liberty and love are good arguments. I would gladly accept your terms, even at the risk of shocking my highly respectable family by presenting to them such a rough old beaver as my grandfather-in-law. The Reverend Charles, I am convinced, would advise me to choose the roasting, and he would publish, at his own expense, a new edition of Fox’s Book of Martyrs, with a pictorial account of my horrible

end; but the Reverend Charles is not in love with Annette, as I am. There is, however, one objection."

"What's that?" growled Barteau.

"I have no desire to purchase a wife, after the Indian fashion. If I can win the love of Annette, I will gladly make her mine; but I will not marry her against her will."

"I will see to that," said Barteau, as he rose to go; "the gal will do as I tell her to do."

"Permit me to observe that you stated, a while ago, that she had a will of her own, and I think you were right about it."

"Never you mind, stranger. Stick to your say-so, and I will make it right with the gal."

"There may be stranger things in heaven and earth than this amounts to; but I don't believe there are many," thought Searle, when Jean Barteau had squeezed himself out of the cave. "This is what I must call decidedly a mixed joke. A mixed joke is composed of good, bad, and indifferent. I have had the bad and the good, and now, if this wild Snow Bird should prove to be indifferent toward me, the mixture will be complete."

## CHAPTER X.

### HAGAR.

It was a dark night when Jeannette Labardie set out from Henning's fort, and started across the prairie, shaping her course toward the mountains that loomed up, grand and gloomy, in the east.

After the scene with Major Henning, she had retired to her room, locked the door, and spent some time in an agony of grief bordering on distraction.

The conclusion to which her wandering thoughts arrived was, that there was no longer any shelter for her under Major Henning's roof. He had shown too plainly that he did not believe what she had told him, and that he did believe the

horrible allegations that had been made by James Musson. Worse still; he had accused her of having repaid his kindness with the basest ingratitude—of having acted as a spy against him, for the benefit of a band of murderous savages.

If she had reflected, she would have known that the charge was an improbable one, and that Major Henning would not have made it in a moment of calmness. She would have been sure that he would retract it, when he came to consider the matter coolly. But the charge had been made, and it had wounded her so deeply as to destroy her powers of reflection. She only felt that she must fly from the presence of a man who could accuse her so unjustly, and of so base a crime."

She knew not whither she would go, or what she would do after she left the fort. A terrible fate had been following her during fifteen years, and again she must fly before it. This time, she could not doubt, it was destined to overtake her, to find her far in the wilderness, homeless and friendless.

She hesitated when she thought of her son. Should she take him with her, or leave him at the fort? She feared that it would be death to him, as well as to her, if he should go forth like Ishmael with Hagar; but she could not leave him. Was it not probable that Major Henning would visit her supposed sins upon him, and treat him as a vagabond and the son of a wicked woman? Besides, she could not bear the thought of separation from him. She was selfish enough to wish that he might perish with her, if she must perish in the wilderness.

She took nothing with her, except a very few articles of absolute necessity—a heavy shawl, a little food, and the remnant of the money she had saved since the death of her husband. She made no reply to the wondering questions of Henri, but enjoined silence upon him, and stole quietly out of the house and the inclosure, hushing him tightly by the hand.

It was not until the dark outlines of the fort had mingled in the general gloom of the night, that she gave him any explanation of this strange proceeding.

"We are going away from that place, my boy," she said. "I do not know where we will go to, or what we will do; but we are going away from the fort. Major Henning has spoken very harshly to your mother, and has accused her of being a wicked woman. I suppose he thought he was acting right; but he has done me a great wrong, and I can not stay under his roof any longer."

"If I was a man, mother, I would make him sorry for that," said Henri, looking up into her face.

"You should not say so, my boy, and you must have no hard feeling against Major Henning. He has protected us during many years, and has been very kind to us. He was angry at something that had occurred, and a man made a false charge against me which he believed. Appearances were not in my favor, and I do not know that I ought to blame him."

"Of course you would speak a good word for him; but he must have acted very badly, to drive you out of the fort in this way. He had better not come across my path when I get bigger. What are you going to do, mother?"

"I do not know, Henri," replied Jeannette, whom this question affected very painfully, now that she was compelled to answer it. "I knew that I could not stay at the fort any longer, whatever happened, and I left my course to be directed by Providence. If God does not guide and guard us, I fear that we must be lost. Perhaps we may meet with some friendly party of trappers or emigrants, for there are likely to be many in the valley at this season. But I fear that we may be starved before that happens, if we are not captured by the savages."

"I have brought my bow and arrows that Bob Thatcher made for me, and I will make as good a fight as I can if we meet any red-skins. I wish you had got a gun for me, as I wanted you to, and then you would have seen what I could do."

"I am afraid that you could do but little, my dear boy. We can only trust in Him who is the protector of the widows and orphans."

On went the desolate mother and her child, through the dark and gloomy night, over the wild and broken prairie,

with a wide wilderness around her, closed in at the east by the seemingly impassable barrier of the immense mountain-range.

When they had traveled a few hours, however, and the way became more rugged and difficult, the steps of Madame Labardie began to falter, and she walked slowly and listlessly. Henri observed that her strength was failing, and concluded that it was time to prove his experience in hunters' ways and his ability to take care of her.

"You are getting worn out, mother," he said. "It won't do for us to go any further to-night. Here is the creek on which I was fishing the other day, and I know a first-rate place to camp."

"It is true, my son, that I am very tired, and I can hardly walk any more. As we will have to sleep on the ground and in the open air, we may as well begin now. If you will show the way to the place you speak of, we will try to rest during the remainder of the night."

Henri led his mother to a secluded little nook near the bank of the creek, a pleasant spot, where the hills closed in upon the stream.

"I have some matches, Henri," said Madame Labardie. "If we can find some wood here, we had better start a fire to keep us warm through the night."

"We have nothing to cut wood with," replied the boy; "but that wouldn't make any difference, if it was right to have a fire. I reckon you haven't been out with the trappers and hunters as much as this boss has. It won't do to have a fire, because the light would be sure to bring the red-skins down on us. Just you wrap yourself up in your shawl, mother, and lie down and go to sleep. I will keep watch over the camp."

Jeanette protested against such an arrangement, and finally put an absolute veto upon it; so that Henri was compelled to lie down by her side and share her shawl.

The widow and the orphan were protected that night. They slept well, and were in no way molested. Early in the morning they were awake, and, after a cold breakfast from Madame Labardie's scanty store, they again started on their trackless route.



Henri rose upon one knee, without moving a twig or stirring a leaf, and aimed his arrow truly. The antelope must have heard the beating of the boy's heart; for it started, just as Henri's bowstring twanged, and was struck full in the breast by his sharp arrow.

Excited by his success, the young hunter shouted to his mother as the animal fell—a shout of joy and triumph. Madame Labarrie ran to him affrighted, and found him exulting over the dying antelope.

Before she could fully comprehend what had happened, both mother and son were surprised by the appearance of a third person, a young girl, dressed in Indian costume, who stepped down from the rocks near them, and quietly approached them.

"Here's the girl that I told you about, mother!" exclaimed Henri. "Isn't she a stunner! I hope that freckle-faced old chap isn't with her."

Jeannette looked at the new-comer in astonishment; but the girl, without saying a word to either, walked to the antelope, slit its throat with a hunting-knife, and proceeded to skin and dress it, a work which she performed in good hunter's style.

Henri, not to be behind-hand in usefulness, bestirred himself to gather some wood and make a fire. In a short time a number of juicy cutlets of the antelope were hissing and sputtering, on forked sticks, before the blaze.

The girl then washed her hands, turned around with a smile, and seated herself on the grass near the spring.

"As you have been so kind as to butcher our game, I hope that you will consent to share our repast," said Madame Labarrie, smiling upon the stranger in return.

"Yes, I will eat with you," replied the girl. "But where did you come from, and how did you get here?"

"I might ask you the same question; but I will tell you my story. Perhaps God has sent you to guide me to friends."

Jeannette then explained, in brief and simple language, why she had left Henning's fort, and gave an account of the wanderings of herself and Henri. The girl listened with intense interest, and was silent for a few moments after the conclusion of the narrative.

"He told you that old father Barteau was your father," she then said, fixing her earnest eyes upon Madame Labardie. "Is that true?"

"He has said so. Do you know him?"

"Yes; I live with him. He calls himself my grand-dad."

"He calls himself your grandfather! And your name is Annette, my boy told me."

"Yes; my name is Annette, I believe; but I am generally called Snow Bird, because I was found in the snow."

"Found in the snow! When? Where? How?"

"That is more than I know. It must have happened when I was very young. I did not always live with father Barteau; for I remember riding in the lap of my own father, while it was snowing. I have my father's picture. No one ever told me that it was his picture; but I know it is."

"Good God! What is this that you are telling me?" exclaimed Madame Labardie. "You say that you were lost in the snow, and that you have your father's picture? Show me that picture, child! Be quick!"

The girl drew from her bosom a small gold locket, that was fastened by a leather thong about her neck. Jeannette took it and hastily opened it, disclosing the well-remembered features of her dead husband, Henri Labardie! She clasped the girl in her arms, and burst into tears.

"How wonderful are the ways of Providence!" she exclaimed, between her sobs. "God be thanked, who has sent me into the wilderness to find my child! Annette, you are my own lost little girl! Henri, this is your sister Annette, who was dead, and is alive! Oh, God! thy judgments are just, and thy chastisements are merciful!"

We must pass over the long and earnest conversation that ensued, and can only say that the cooking of the antelope meat was neglected, and that Henri was the only one who did any thing like justice to the repast.

"It is growing late, mother, and something must be done," said Annette at last. "As you are unwilling to go back to the fort, and are afraid to venture among the Blackfeet, you must have a hiding-place for the present. Follow me, and I will take you to a spot where neither white nor red men can find you."

Madame Lahardie gladly arose, and, with Henri, followed Amette up into the hills. All three were well loaded with choice portions of the allclope, intended to be kept for future use.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE WORST AND BEST OF THE JOKE.

GEORGE SEARLE'S thumbs, after the visit of Jean Barteau, were as badly "mixed" as the state of his affairs. The Indians brought him to some supper and a blanket, and he ate the supper and lay down on the blanket; but he was wakeful and uneasy. When he did sleep, his dreams were filled with visions of painted savages dancing around a burning victim, covetous and barbarous old men leading to him troops of blooming daughters, strangely-dressed girls beckoning to him from the tops of inaccessible cliffs, and, among all these appearances, towering over all and frowning at all, the solemn figure of his highly-respectable parent, the Reverend Charles Fauquier Searle.

"Really," said the young gentleman, when he arose and rubbed his eyes in the morning, "it will be a positive necessity for me to change my boarding-house, if I am troubled with any more such dreams as I had last night. Perhaps the sheets were not properly aired, or the pillows were too hard, or the room is not well ventilated. My aunt Virginia would go into spasms if she knew that I was so poorly accommodated."

By the time the sun was four hours high, he was still more disgusted with his "boarding-house," for he had begun to grow weary of his confinement. The uncertainty of his fate, too, troubled him, and he was both anxious to know what was to be the end of his perplexities, and to see the beautiful creature who had lured him into that dreadful place.

In the latter part of his wish he was gratified. The entrance was darkened a little, and then the cave was suddenly

brightened by the appearance of the Snow Bird, who fitted in as lightly as if she had been made of air.

She looked more beautiful than ever, Searle thought; but there was a pouting and wilful expression lurking about her lips and eyes, that confirmed him in his opinion that she was a difficult subject to deal with. He rose and greeted her joyfully, with his best bow and his most pleasant smile.

"As sunlight to the prisoner in his cell, so are you welcome to me," he said. "You are both light and warmth to me, and I feel that I should fade and die without you."

"You had better save your fine speeches for your Indian judges," replied Annette, with a pout. "They are wasted on me, as I do not pretend to understand them, and do not want to. I have come here on business, and have little to say."

"Say on. If every word was a dagger, you would be welcome to plunge them into my heart!"

"What nonsense! If you would take my advice, you would stop talking foolishly, and think about saving your scalp."

"Of what use would a scalp be to me when my heart is gone?"

"It might serve to cover your brains, if you have any. I have come here because father Bartlett told me to come. He says that I am to marry you, that you are a rich young man, that you have promised to marry me and take me to the States, and that you will support him in ease and comfort during the rest of his life. I have come here to say to you that I don't mean to do any such thing."

"Don't say that just yet, my beauty of the wilderness. Don't be too hasty, I beg you. I followed you here the mountains because I loved you, and I assure you that I do love you, most truly and sincerely. Suppose you wait a while, before speaking so very decidedly."

"I don't believe it. You only promised father Bartlett that you would marry me, because you were afraid of being roasted by the blackbird if you did not agree to marry me. I will never marry a man who is forced to marry me, and I will never be forced to marry anybody."

"Permit me to observe, my dear child, that I had no thought of marrying you without your free and full consent.

I told your grandfather—if that old beaver is your grandfather—that I would gladly call you mine if I could win your love, but did not wish to marry you against your will. As for the roasting, that would be unpleasant, I know; but I would not sign away my liberty to save my life."

"It looks very much like a forced business, and it does not suit me. I am too young to marry, and it would not do for one so poor and ignorant as I am to marry a rich and educated gentleman. Besides, I do not wish to marry any man. I had rather marry a mountain."

"Softly, my dear child. Don't put out the light yet. Let me live a little longer."

"I have said all that I meant to say on that subject. As you say that I brought you into this trouble, I must try to get you out of it. Be patient, and I will see what I can do."

The girl flitted out of the cave as swiftly as she had entered it, leaving Searle in a rather dismal plight.

He was not long left alone with his gloomy reflections. In a short time he had another visitor, who proved to be the bald-headed and freckle-faced James Musson.

This individual had a proposition to make; but he did not come to the point in as plain and straightforward a manner as Barteau had done. In fact, it was not until after a great deal of talk and circumlocution that he made Searle aware of what he wanted.

The business part of this conversation, when reduced to a few words, amounted to this: He knew that the young gentleman had come from Henning's fort, and supposed that he would be likely to have some influence with its inmates. He had a grudge against Searle, on account of having been battered by him a few days before; but was willing to forego revenge, if the prisoner would consent to serve him in on matter.

When Searle asked what it was that he was wanted to do he was told that Musson desired to gain possession of a lady who was living at the fort, named Jeannette Labardie, and her son. He had a right to them, he said, and it would be easy for Searle to induce them to come to him, or to draw them away from the fort by some stratagem, so as to enable Musson to seize them.

Without showing his disgust the young gentleman inquired of Musson what right he claimed over the lady in question; whether he was her father, her husband, or any other relative.

"I was to have been her husband," replied Musson. "She was given to me by her father, years ago; but she eloped with a younger man. It is needless to argue the question of right, however. Your life is in danger, and you have a chance to save it, which you should not be foolish enough to throw away. If you will pledge me your word that you will do all you can to assist me in this matter, you shall go free; if you will not, you must take the consequences."

"I believe I understand you," said Searle; "and I have no doubt that you will understand me when I tell you that I would see you in the bottomless pit before I would think of doing such a thing. Whatever the consequences may be, I have nothing more to say on the subject, except to remark that you must be an infernal rascal."

Musson was so angry at this pointed rebuff, that his face turned ashy pale.

"You may count on being tortured to death by the Black feet, as soon as they find time to attend to your case," he said, as he hastily left the cave.

"This whole affair is rather worse mixed than any scrape I ever happened to drop into before," thought Searle. "It seems that people in this region, like those in civilized communities, have their own ends to serve, and that their objects vary pretty widely. Firstly, the black-booted red-men desire to cook me, without even the excuse of wishing to serve me up for dinner. Secondly, an old villain wishes me to marry a beautiful girl, for his benefit. Thirdly, a cadaverous customer is anxious to employ me as the abductor of a very nice widow lady, and that is the worst of all. The wretch would never have made such a proposition to me, if he had been acquainted with me; but he wasn't. What a useful fellow I would be if I could satisfy all these demands! The second is barred by the girl herself, who decidedly repudiates the alliance. The third is barred by my own nature, which could never be brought to such business. There remains, therefore, only the purpose of the aboriginals that I can serve. It

appears, therefore, that I am reserved to be roasted, unless the Snow Bird should fly to my rescue and hide me under her wings. I wish that freckle-faced old scoundrel could be compelled to stand for two solid hours, and hear my highly respectable parent lecture on moral depravity."

The young gentleman passed the remainder of the day in framing plans for escape, all of which he dismissed and found to be impracticable, and in wondering what was to happen next. No more visitors came to cheer or sadden his solitude, and he lay down on his blanket at night in a very depressed and uncomfortable state of mind.

It must have been about twelve o'clock at night when he was awakened by a bright light in his prison, which shone full on his eyes. He had been dreaming of Indians and torture, and he started to his feet, expecting to find himself surrounded by painted and infuriated savages; but he saw only the lithe and graceful figure of Annette, who stood before him with a torch in her hand.

"Come," said she, "and I will show you how to escape torture and save your scalp."

"How did you come here?" eagerly asked Searle. "Are the Indian guards gone, or are they asleep?"

"I don't know. I did not come in that way, and we will not go out that way."

"What do you mean? There is no other way?"

"Are you sure of that? I will show you that your eyes are not quite as sharp as you think they are."

The girl led the way to a dark corner of the cave, where she pointed out a fissure in the cliff, hidden behind a point of rock. It was so concealed, by the darkness and the rock, that Searle did not wonder at his not finding it when he examined his prison.

Annette easily entered the fissure with her torch, and the young gentleman with difficulty squeezed himself into it. He found himself in a rough and narrow passage, which he could easily traverse by stooping a little. Annette went in advance, bearing the torch, and Searle followed her through the windings of the passage, until they came out at the side of the hill, not far from the Indian village.

"I must confess, Snow Bird, that your eyes are sharper

than mine, as well as brighter," said Searle, after drawing in a long breath of the fresh night air. "I examined that cave very closely, but saw nothing of that passage by which we left it."

"I happened to find it when we were in this valley last year," replied Annette. "I must put out this light, as it might be seen from the village. There are only a few warriors left behind, but they might trouble us if they should see the light."

"What is the matter with the Blackfeet? Where have they gone?" asked Searle, his thoughts instantly recurring to Henning's fort and its inmates.

"I suppose I ought not to tell you. I am afraid to tell you what they are doing."

"They have gone to attack Major Henning's station. You need not try to conceal it from me. Why were you afraid to tell me about it?"

"Because I was afraid that you would want to go down there and try to get into the fort. You have no gun, and they would kill you."

"Do you feel enough interest in me, then, to care whether I live or die? I am glad to hear it, pretty Snow Bird. Will you let me tell you now that I love you? I am no longer in danger of being roasted, and that red-faced old beaver can not force either of us to marry; but I assure you, Annette, that I still love you most truly and sincerely."

"Let us not speak of that now," implored Annette. "Something wonderful has happened since I last saw you. There has been a change in my feelings, and I am much happier than I was."

"What is it, Snow Bird? Please tell me."

"I have found my mother."

"Your mother! Here in the wilderness? In these mountains? Who is she, and where did you find her?"

"She came from Henning's fort, which she left because she had been badly treated there—she and my brother. I found them in the hills last evening, and I left them in a safe hiding-place until I could come and bring you out of the cave."

"Is it Madame Labardie?"

"Yes."

"That nice widow lady whom I saw at the fort? I congratulate you most heartily, pretty Snow Bird. Old Bateau, then, is not your grandfather?"

"I suppose he is. My mother says that he is her father, but she—"

"She is not proud of the relationship, I presume. Well, we can abolish him, if we wish to. As you are so happy, Annette, can't you make me happy, too, by telling me that you love me a little?"

"I do like you very much," replied the girl, with her eyes on the ground; "but I am very young."

"And I am young, also; but we will both grow older. I am in no hurry, charming Snow Bird. I will be happy if you will love me. Let us now go to Madame Labardie, that we may be happy together and take counsel together."

Annette did not lead the way this time, but took the hand of the young gentleman, and together they went around the Indian village and out of the valley.

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## CHAPTER XII.

### TROUBLE AT THE FORT.

WHEN Jeannette Labardie retired to her room, after the scene with Major Henning, she locked the door, and allowed no one to enter, not even good Mrs. Henning, who desired to talk with her and console her.

At supper she did not make her appearance. Major Henning sat and waited for her, looking very grave and moody and there was an expression of pain and distress upon the countenance of his wife. Neither spoke of the absent member of the family, however, until Henri came in and took his seat at the table, when the Major directed him to go and request his mother to come to supper.

The boy went, but did not return, and the major and his wife supped alone and in silence, neither mentioning the subject which had been so severely agitated.

In the morning neither Madame Labardie nor her son was visible, and breakfast was as gloomy and silent as supper had been, Mrs. Henning's look of distress having grown deeper and darker.

When her husband had left the room, the good old lady went to Jeannette's door and knocked. Receiving no response, she called her by name: but all was silent within. At last she tried the latch, and perceived that the door was unlocked. Opening it, she entered the room, and found it deserted. The bed had not been slept in, and it was evident that the occupant of the apartment had gone away.

What had become of her? Mrs. Henning was now so alarmed and excited, that she no longer held her husband in awe, and she immediately set at work to institute a search for the missing ones. The fort, the store-house, the outbuildings, and all the cabins and grounds within the inclosure were examined; but neither Jeannette nor her son was to be found. Everybody was questioned; but no one had seen the missing mother and child.

Such a proceeding could not long continue, of course, without attracting the notice of Major Henning, who, not participating in the search, went into his house, and sent to request his wife to come to him.

"Have you been looking for that woman?" he asked, when she entered the room.

"I have been looking for Jeannette Labardie," replied Mrs. Henning.

"Your good sense should have told you that it was not advisable to cause an excitement and a scandal at the post about that woman. Have you found her?"

"I have not. She has undoubtedly left the fort. You have driven her away by your cruelty, and I hope you are satisfied."

"Do you say that I have driven her away? If she has gone, she has been driven away by her own delicacy—by the consequences of her own wrong-doing."

"Your language was too severe for her to bear, and she has left us; she has nowhere to go to, and must perish in the wilderness with her child."

"Better that she should perish, than that you and I, and all those for whose lives I am responsible, should be delivered up to the merciless savages. But there is no danger that she will perish. We only are in danger, and I must see to it that an extra watch is kept, and that every man in the fort sleeps by his arms to-night."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that that woman has doubtless gone direct from here to her confederates in the hills—to her rascally relatives—to her father and her husband. She will soon bring the savages down upon us, and it will indeed be a wonder if we escape destruction, when she has so well informed them of our condition."

"Major Henning" said the old lady, very gravely, "I have always considered you a man of excellent common-sense, and have always deferred to your opinion in all questions that have arisen between us. I must say, however, that in this matter you seem to have been forsaken by your usual judgment and sagacity. If Jeannette was really the wife of that man, and if she had really left him, as he charges, is it not plain that she would be afraid to meet him, and that she would be unwilling to hold any communication with him? Your accusation, therefore, is not only groundless, but really nonsensical."

"Fudge!" exclaimed the irate major, to whom the same consideration had already presented itself quite unpleasantly. "It is plain that she is shamming, or he is shamming, or both of them are shamming. *Falsus in uno falsus in omnibus*, is an old and safe maxim. If a person is once proved to have acted with duplicity, he is to be trusted in nothing."

"Has it ever occurred to you, major, that Jeannette Labardie may possibly be our child?"

"No, indeed, of course not. What has put such an absurd idea into your head?"

"I was thinking of it last night. The thought kept me awake, and has distressed me ever since. Jean Barteau was not a married man, as far as we knew, when he was in the service of the government, and yet Jeannette was surely born before he left that service. She is just of the age that our little girl would have been if she had lived. Besides, although

Bartean caused her to be educated, she never felt toward him as a child should feel toward a father. There is a great deal in natural sympathies."

"There is a great deal of nonsense in your head," exclaimed the major, rising and pacing the floor in great excitement. "I am really afraid that you are going crazy, Mrs. Henning. I never before knew you to conceive of such a wild and ridiculous notion. It—it—it is too absurd to talk about."

"It does not seem improbable to me," persisted the old lady. "You know that Bartean hated you, that he had Indian blood in his veins; and that an Indian never forgets or forgives what he believes to be an injury. He disappeared from the post just before our daughter was lost. His strange language, when you met him in St. Louis, can only be explained by supposing that he had settled his grudge by stealing your child."

"This is too much to bear!" said the major, whose face was as red as fire, and whose manner gave evidence of the greatest mental agitation. "If you ever mention this subject to me again, madam, I shall be very much offended. It is strange that you should take advantage of such an occasion as this to revive the painful recollections connected with the loss of our child, and that you should do so in such an unpleasant and extravagant manner. I do not wish to hear another word about it."

"I must say, though, Major Henning, that I can not dismiss the subject from my mind; for it weighs heavily upon my heart. Since I have known Jeannette, I have felt toward her as a mother; and I feel now as if my child, with her own offspring, is wandering in the wilderness to perish of starvation, if she does not fall a prey to wild beasts or more ferocious savages. I hope you will send some men to look for her."

"I shall do no such thing," fiercely replied the major. "I have not men enough to defend the post, and can spare none to be murdered by the Blackfeet. I shall surely send no one to look for that—that—woman. I must leave you, madam, for I can listen to your ravings no longer."

So saying, Major Henning hastily left the room, slamming the door furiously behind him.

Although the old gentleman had been so prompt to ridicule the idea advanced by his wife, it had moved him very deeply. He could not help feeling that it was possible, and more than possible, that she might be right in her conjecture, and it was this that had so greatly excited him.

Although he had hitherto had no doubt that his lost child had been drowned in the Platte river, he had always had a lurking suspicion that Jean Barteau must have been in some way connected with her disappearance. He had never had, any proof of this, and had wished, when he met Barteau in St. Louis, to renew his acquaintance with him, in the hope that the trapper might let slip something by which he could gain some information concerning his child.

The rebuff he had then received, and the strange language in which it was couched, had puzzled him at the time, and he now admitted that nothing but Mrs. Henning's supposition could explain Barteau's words.

He had been so angry and excited, since receiving the communication from Musson, that he had not considered the possibility of Jeannette not being Barteau's child. As soon, however, as his wife mentioned it, supporting her views by such clear and unanswerable arguments, it struck him with great force. He was so vexed because this idea had not occurred to him before, and because he had acted so hastily and harshly on receiving Musson's letter, that he could not speak calmly on the subject, and was unwilling to hear it mentioned.

The mischief had been done, and was past remedy. He could not think of sending out a party in search of the runaways, as they would only run the risk of being slaughtered, and his little garrison would be so weakened that it would be impossible to resist the attack of the Blackfeet which might be expected at any moment.

The day was spent in hurried and anxious preparation, in strengthening the defenses of the post, and in getting arms and ammunition in readiness for the struggle. Major Henning labored as hard as any of the men, and kept away from his wife during the day, as he feared a renewal of the painful conversation of the morning.

At night he distributed an abundance of ammunition, and

caused every man who was capable of bearing arms to mount guard, telling them that they might expect an attack from the Blackfeet before morning. The result proved the correctness of his judgment.

The country about the fort was not favorable to Indian warfare, as it was mostly open and rolling prairie; but there was a water-course near the post, which was lined with a thick growth of cottonwoods and willows. In this cover the Blackfeet collected undiscovered by the garrison.

About two hours before day they burst forth from their concealment, and rushed upon the fort, with savage whoops and yells. Thanks to the vigilance of Major Henning, the garrison were prepared to meet them, and received them with a hot and rapid fire.

Foiled in their attempt to capture the post by surprise, the assailants wavered at first; but, urged on by their white leaders, they returned to the attack, and boldly swarmed up to the walls of the fort.

It was an excellent thing for Major Henning and his post, that his employes were skillful, resolute and active men, who had become inured to dangers and hardships by years of exposure on the plains and in the mountains. If they had shown the least cowardice or lack of spirit, their enemies would have been so encouraged that they would have persevered until their attempt succeeded. But not a cheek blanched, not a nerve quivered; every man stood bravely up to his work; the little garrison fought with such skill and energy, as to make the Indians believe that their force was double what it was. As it was, a number of Blackfeet gained a lodgment within the inclosure, from which they were only driven by the most desperate exertions.

As soon as day dawned, the savages drew off with howls of rage and vengeance; but it was soon evident that their attempt was not abandoned. Taking advantage of the rolling nature of the prairie, they sheltered themselves behind its swells, and dug holes in the earth, from which they maintained such a close and constant fire upon the fort, that not one of the garrison could show himself, without becoming a target for their bullets and arrows.

Major Henning's force had not escaped without scath.

One of his men had been killed, and two were severely wounded. It was a small loss, considering the severity of the fight and the numbers of their assailants; but it was a terrible loss at that time and to that little band.

Not a fighting man could be spared from the defense of the fort for any purpose. Their food was brought to them, and their ammunition was prepared by those who were unable to fight. They had had no sleep during the previous night, and their labors had been very arduous. It was evident that exhaustion must compel them to succumb, unless the Blackfeet should soon abandon the siege. The coming night would be the time of greatest peril, and Major Henning could not conceal the anxiety with which he awaited its approach.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### BART SWANNICK'S OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

BART SWANNICK made no strong endeavors to dissuade Searle from his expedition in search of the girl whom he had seen in the mountains, and of information concerning the movements of the Blackfeet. The old hunter well knew that arguments and entreaties would be wasted on his obstinate young friend, who had "set his head" on this project, and was bound to follow the bent of his inclination.

Bart, therefore, soon fell in with the young gentleman's humor, shouldered his rifle, and announced his intention of accompanying him.

This did not exactly suit Searle, whose sole object was to get a nearer view of the girl who had so taken his fancy. He preferred to pursue this object alone and in his own way, and considered Bart an undesirable incumbrance.

His first efforts, then, were devoted to shaking off the old hunter, or getting rid of him in some way, which was by no means an easy thing to do. He tried several devices, but only succeeded in apprising Bart of his purpose, and putting the old fellow on the alert.

At night they encamped on the same creek near which Searle had rescued Henri Labardie from the clutches of James Musson. As usual, they were to take turns during the night in watching and sleeping. Searle's watch came in the latter part of the night, and then he carried out a plan upon which he had been meditating.

Waiting until it was nearly morning, he left his companion sound asleep, went to the creek, and walked in the shallow water down its bed for a considerable distance, in exactly the opposite direction from that which Bart would suppose him likely to take. He then made a circuit, and struck into the hills at a point considerably to the east of the camp where he had left his friend.

He felt some compunctions of conscience at leaving the old hunter asleep and without a guard; but he knew that Bart was able to take care of himself, and he was bound to accomplish the purpose on which he had "set his head."

"Jest as I 'spected," muttered Bart, when he awoke, only a short time after Searle had left him, and found himself alone. Some strange hunter's instinct had warned him that the camp was unguarded, and he had been restless and uneasy until his sleep came to an end.

"Jest as I 'spected; the boy has gone and done it, as it was his natur' to go and do. I was sartin that suthin' of this kind was goin' to happen afore mornin'; but that was no use in my keepin' awake all night, 'cause he'd only be' wanted, and played the joke off on me some time when I was obliged to sleep. When he has got his head set onto any thin', he is bound to go through with it, and it seems that that ain't nothin' in natur' to stop him. In coorse he has put off into the hills, arter that gal, as fast as he kin go, and all I've got to do is to follow him up. I don't believe the boy has got sense enough to hide his trail from me."

The old man trusted himself to a light "moonshin" before commencing his search, and then, after examining the "sign" about the camp, followed Searle's trail down to the creek.

He grinned as he perceived that the young gentleman had entered the creek, and proceeded to follow it up on the bank, carefully noticing each side, to see where the young gentleman had come out.

For two hours he followed the stream toward its head, retracing his steps several times, and becoming more perplexed the further he went. At last, having gone a long distance without seeing the slightest sign of a trail leading from the creek, he could not avoid coming to the conclusion that he had taken the wrong direction.

"Eyther the boy is powerful fond of the water," said he, "or he has got more sense than I gave him credit for. He has been with me long enough to learn a little suthin', and I reckon he has fooled the old coon this time. Wal, I know about whar he is p'intin' fur, and I must jist go thar and look fur him. I wouldn't hev him lost fur a power of money."

Having thus decided, the old hunter hastened off into the hills, toward the west, hoping that he might be able to "head off" his charge, or overtake him before he could get into any serious mischief. He saw nothing of the young man, however, nor did he get upon his trail until late in the afternoon.

He was not slow to follow the trail when he had discovered it, and it led him on, further up toward the mountains, until he observed that it was crossed by another.

"Jest as I 'spected," he muttered, as he examined both trails. "He has found the gal, or the gal has found him. That little track was never made by a man's hoof, and Georgin's track I know well enough, fur it shows whar I patched his moccasin."

As Bart followed the trail, it was not long before he perceived that Searle had been in the advance, and that the girl had been following him. By carefully examining the tracks wherever the ground was soft enough for the feet to leave an impression, he could almost read the very thoughts of those whose trail he was pursuing; but he was obliged to admit that he was puzzled in this instance. Knowing that Searle had been following the girl, he was unable to account for the fact that she had become, to all appearance, the pursuer.

"I'm kinder beat, and that's a fact," he muttered, shaking his head dubiously. "If they war two men, I might read the sign; but thar's no countin' on any thar' fur sars when women folks are about. I've a notion that I will see taken of some kind of a scrape afore long."

His prediction was soon verified. He came to a place where the trail was broken, and the ground, discolored by blood and beaten and trampled, gave evidence of a severe struggle. Here he paused, and examined the traces closely, to determine what had happened.

"Red-skins hev been about, and somebody has been tied," he thought, as he picked up a bit of cut thong. "It must hev been Georgie who was tied, and they wouldn't hev tied him if he was killed. He wasn't laid hurt, eyther; for that goes his trail, and the gal's, too, along with the red-skins'."

As there could be no doubt that Searle had been captured by the Blackfeet, Bart followed the trail, which was now plain enough, until it brought him into a valley in which he discovered the Indians encamped. Climbing one of the heights by which the valley was shut in, he reached an eminence from which he had a good view of all that was going on below. It was night when he attained this elevation, and he could do nothing but rest until morning.

In the morning he kept a close watch upon the encampment; but saw nothing of Searle, nor any indications of his presence in the valley, until he caught sight of the girl who had brought the young gentleman into trouble, and noticed that she went toward the upper end of the valley.

Following her with his eyes, he watched her until she disappeared at the foot of the cliff. Then he worked his way, cautiously and laboriously, along the side of the height, and brought himself near enough to the upper limit of the valley, to see a hole in the rock, guarded by two Indian warriors.

"Whar the gal goes, thar Georgie is to be found," was his muttered conclusion. "Those two red-skins will hev to suffer to-night."

The old hunter watched his chance as if his life depended upon it. Not only did he wait until night, but waited until the night was far spent, until he supposed that the senses of the Indian guards would be deadened by their long and sleepless ward. Then, with his ax in one hand and his rifle in the other, he crawled silently toward the mouth of the cave, where one of the Blackfeet was asleep, and the other was keeping watch by his side.

Stealthily as a cat he approached, marking his victim, and

buried his ax in the brain of the waking Indian, who fell without a murmur. The other sprang to his feet, just in time to meet the point of Bart's knife, which silenced the cry that had risen to his lips.

Stepping over the slain savages, he entered the cave, and found it empty. After a close scrutiny, becoming satisfied that the object of his search was not there, he passed out, shaking his head solemnly. Seeing a rifle lying by the side of one of the Blackfeet, he picked it up, and perceived that it was the fine double-barreled rifle which had belonged to George Searle.

"They've got him, by ginger!" he exclaimed, as he left the place with the weapon. "The next question is, what is he? That question has got to be answered afore I quit this trail, sure as my name is Bart-holler-mew!"

Returning to his station at the side of the valley, he waited until morning, when he discovered that the Indian village was nearly deserted. He had noticed a number of warriors leaving the valley during the early part of the night, as if going on the war-path, and it was now evident to him that they had gone for the purpose of attacking Henning's fort.

"Mighty sorry that I can't be thar," he thought, "to help the whites in that skrimmage; but business comes before pleasure, and my business jest now is to find Georgie Searle. It ain't likely that they've got him with them, and I may get a sight of eyther him or the gal, if I keep on a-watchin'?"

There was a great disturbance in the village when the bodies of the two Blackfeet were discovered at the mouth of the cave, and two horsemen soon went galloping down the valley; but Bart saw nothing more that particularly attracted his attention, until a little after noon, when there came riding into the valley a burly and red-faced white man, whom he at once recognized.

Jean Barteau—for it was he who came into the valley—rode direct to the cave, and then back to the village, from which runners were started out in different directions. The ex-trapper then slowly moved off down the valley.

Struck by a new idea, Bart Swannick left his perch, and hastened, by a short route, to a point which he thought Barteau would be likely to pass, if he was going toward the

fort. He had hardly concealed himself and taken breath, when the old man made his appearance, riding slowly along.

"You've got to stop that, and that's a fact," said Swannick, as he stepped out with leveled rifle.

Jean Barteau did pause for a moment, and then, with a shout to his horse, darted off in another direction. The next instant a shot from Bart brought the horse to the ground, and his rider fell with him.

Jumping up, Barteau raised his gun, and turned upon his assailant; but the hunter had already drawn a bead upon him with George Searle's rifle, and ordered him to drop his weapon and advance.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked Barteau, perceiving his disadvantage.

"My name is Bart-holler-mew Swannick, though I'm generally called Bart Swannick. I reckon you've heard of me."

"I hev heard of you, and I remember you. What hev you got ag'inst me?"

"I want to know what you hev done with a likely young chap named Georgie Searle."

"I don't know whar he is. The Blackfeet had him; but he got away last night, and kerried off my gal with him—confound him!"

"So he's got the gal! I allers said that Georgie was bound to do whatever he had his head sot onto. I ain't by no means sartin, though, old horse, whether I kin believe what you say, and I've got another claim ag'inst you, too."

"What's that?"

"I sorter remember suthin ag'inst you. I've got a kind of a crooked idee in my head, and I shall need you to straighten out the kinks of it. Jest you drap that gun, step forred, turn your back to me, and hold out your hands behind, so that I kin tie 'em, or I'll send a bullet through your head quicker'n lightnin'."

With a very ill grace Barteau complied with this demand, hoping that no harm was really intended him. Swannick tied the hands of his prisoner behind his back, and marched him off toward the fort, carrying Searle's rifle and his own.

"Whar are you goin'?" Whar do you want to take me to?" asked the old man, after they had gone a considerable distance

"I want to get into Henning's fort. That's the place I mean to take you to," replied Swannick.

"You can't do it. The Blackfeet are all around the fort, if they ain't in it by this time."

"We'll see about it. Hello! who's a comin' here? Whites, by ginger!"

Jean Barteau looked around, and saw a band of fifty or sixty trappers coming up a defile, in the midst of whom were George Searie and Annette, with Jeannette Labardie and Henri.

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## CHAPTER XIV.

### JAMES MUSSON'S DISASTER.

BARTEAU and Musson were both greatly astonished and disappointed at the failure of their night attack upon Henning's fort. Although they knew that Major Henning must be aware of the presence of the Blackfeet in the vicinity, and that he would be prepared to receive them, they had by no means expected such a reception as they met with.

They had hoped to take the fort by surprise, not doubting that they would easily be able to overcome its small garrison. Their information concerning the condition of the post was furnished by Musson himself, who had visited it in disguise.

Believing that they would find few to oppose them, the Blackfeet and their white leaders had felt secure of an easy victory. In proportion to the confidence with which they had gone to the attack, so great was their dismay when they drew off, repulsed, if not defeated.

As the little garrison made up by bravery and activity for their lack of numbers, the Blackfeet could not help supposing that their force was at least twice as great as it was, and they naturally concluded that they had been deceived by their leaders. Many angry words were spoken among them, and many dark looks were directed at Barteau and Musson, especially the latter, who assumed to be a great "medicine-man," and who promised them a cure and easy victory.

According to the usual tactics of the Blackfeet, who depended entirely upon surprises and sudden attacks, they would have abandoned the attempt upon the fort, when their first assault had failed, had it not been for their white captives, who told them that the garrison would soon be obliged to succumb, and urged them to persevere in the siege.

Hardly had Barteau, who acted as commander of the forces, placed his men in proper positions, and organized the siege so that the garrison in the fort must be continually annoyed and ultimately wearied out, when a messenger came riding at full speed from the Indian village, who informed him that his white prisoner had escaped.

"Thunder and lightning!" exclaimed the ex-trapper, in utter astonishment. "How did it happen?"

The messenger explained that no one knew how the young man had made his escape, that his two guards had been found dead at the mouth of the cave, and that strange footprints had been seen in the vicinity, indicating that the prisoner had had assistance from without.

"That's mortal queer," said Barteau. "'Pears like everythin' goes ag'inst me now, and my luck has all got turned wrong side out. The young chap had nary weepoon fur to kill anybody with, sure."

"Unless Snow Bird gave him one," suggested the Indian.

"What in thunder do you mean by that?"

"The Snow Bird is gone, too."

"Do you mean to say that she went off with that chap?"

The Indian thought it was likely that she had done so, as both had disappeared mysteriously and at the same time.

"If you're foolin' me, red-skin, you'll hev to suffer fur it," said the old man, who was terribly angry and perplexed. "Did you toller that trail?"

The Indian replied that they had not been able to discover any trail, except the strange footprints which he had mentioned, and no one had followed that trail when he left the village.

"Durn thar hides, for a set of blind-eyed holler-headed cusses! Don't you say any thin' about this to anybody hyar, red-skin. I shall want you to go back to the village with me, arter a while."

Having thus cautioned the messenger, Barteau sought his comrade, Musson, to whom he imparted the unpleasant information that he had just received.

"It seems, then, that another of your matrimonial schemes is knocked in the head," said Musson, with a sneer.

"My how much?"

"Another of your marriage plans has failed, as I told you it would. The young man has carried off the girl, or the girl has carried off the young man. It makes no difference, which was in fault, as they have both gone beyond your reach or control. Do you propose to do any thing about it?"

"I mean to go back to the village, and set every he red-skin at work huntin' fur 'em."

"You had better not do it, Barteau. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. If we take this fort, we will find plenty of rich booty, and you will get possession of one of your disobedient children. It will be much better to finish this business, than to run off after an uncertainty."

"I am just goin' up to the village, Jeems Musson, to set the red-skins to huntin', and I won't be long away."

"The Blackfeet will miss you, and will think that there is something wrong. They are angry now, and we had better not do any thing to vex them or excite their suspicions."

"Durn thar suspicions! This hoss ain't goin' to lose sutch a chance fur gittin' ease and comfo't in his old age."

Against the advice of his comrade, the old man mounted his horse, and rode off with the messenger who had come from the Indian village.

He had been gone but a little while, when Musson, intent on his own purposes, sent another flag of truce to the fort to demand a surrender. His demand was contained in a written communication, and the terms were similar to those which he had previously offered, except that he required that all the merchandise and ammunition at the post should be given up to the Indians.

He told Major Henning that he need not expect to be able to hold out against the force that was opposed to him, as the Blackfeet were determined to persevere in the siege, and would be able to weary the garrison to death, if they could not otherwise subdue the post. If the major would surrender,

he (Musson) would guarantee the lives of all in the fort, and would allow them to go where they pleased with their personal effects; otherwise, they might expect only such mercy as Indian conquerors were in the habit of showing.

Major Henning sent back a defiant reply, saying that Musson and his savage allies might do their worst, but they would never scare him into surrender. He was heartily expecting them, he said, and he hoped soon to see their whole horde swept from the face of the earth.

He said nothing about the disappearance of Madame Labardie and her boy, and the conviction was forced upon him that she had not sought refuge with her father and her reputed husband.

As Musson had supposed, the Blackfeet became uneasy and suspicious after the departure of Barteau, who had gone away without informing them of his object or destination. Their murmurs became so loud and frequent, that Red Wolf, their principal chief, approached Musson, and demanded to be informed what had become of the Gray-haired Chief.

Musson attempted to evade a direct answer to the question; but the Blackfoot was imperative in his demand, saying that his people had been once deceived, and were afraid that there was some plot against them. Unless the disappearance of the Gray-haired Chief should be satisfactorily explained, they would abandon the siege, and the consequences of their anger might be still more serious.

Thus pressed, Musson told what had become of Barteau, giving Red Wolf all the information on the subject that he had received. The Gray-haired Chief would be absent but a short time, he said, and he hoped that his red brothers would give themselves no further uneasiness on his account.

Although evidently dissatisfied, Red Wolf promised to pacify his followers, and there was quiet in the camp of the besiegers for a while.

Hours wore away, however, and Barteau did not return. His absence was inexplicable to Musson, who had expected that he would be gone but a little while. It was also a source of great uneasiness, especially as the symptoms of discontent had again commenced among the Blackfeet, and their murmurs were renewed.

As the day drew near to its close, the excitement among the Indians became so great, and their anger toward their white leaders was so manifest, that only a pretext was needed to occasion an outbreak.

The pretext was soon furnished. A scout came in and reported that a large band of trappers was approaching, and was already within a few miles of the fort. The Blackfeet were at once ready to charge Barbeau with having deserted them for the purpose of bringing their white foes upon them, and Musson with being accessory to the plot.

With one accord they abandoned the siege, and hastened to seize upon their white leader; but he had taken the alarm, and was already mounted and flying for his life. Directly the plain was covered with half-naked savages, mounted on their hardy ponies, whooping and yelling like fiends.

In vain Musson urged his horse to its utmost speed. He had involuntarily taken the direction from which the party of trappers was approaching, and this confirmed the savages in the belief that they had been betrayed, and caused them to redouble their efforts. He was soon surrounded and hemmed in, so that it was impossible to escape.

The savages desired to capture him, in order that they might execute their vengeance upon him with the usual accompaniments of torture and derision; but Musson knew what fiends they were when their passions were aroused, and was determined that he would not fall into their hands alive.

Seeing his foes closing in upon him, and despairing of relief, he dismounted from his horse, put a pistol to his head, and sent a bullet through his brain.

The Indians set up a howl of rage as they saw him fall, and another as they perceived that they were doubly disappointed of their revenge; for, just at that moment, the head of the column of trappers appeared on the brow of one of the neighboring hills.

## CHAPTER XV.

### BART SWANNICK'S REVELATION.

THE feelings of Jean Barteau were by no means pleasant when he found himself confronted by the cavalcade that came up out of the defile.

It suited him not at all to see Annette and Searle in such company, or to find Jeannette as he then found her, or to meet these fierce and vindictive trappers, to all of whom his character and mode of life were well known, and many of whom had some special reason for disliking him.

As soon as the band came in sight, he made a desperate effort to free his hands from their bonds, and nearly succeeded in doing so; but Bart Swannick sprung upon him, gave the leather thong an extra twist and tie, and shook the old man so severely that he was almost breathless.

"Hallo, Bart Swannick!" exclaimed Catpaw Speer, the leader of the "brigade" of trappers; "here's a young gentleman who has been inquiring after you. Where did you come from, and who have you got there?"

"Somebody that you know of, I reckon. He is old Jean Barteau, though you mought hev heern of him by the name of Old Frenchy."

"I am glad that you have caught him. Some of us will want to have a settlement with him, I believe."

"Just wait till I git through with him, capt'n. He is my prisoner, and I must settle with him fast."

"Where are you going to take him to?"

"To Henning's fort. If you are goin' that a-way, you ort to hurry, 'cause the red-skins are trying to take the fort, and I've a notion that Major Henning is in a tight fix."

"We had heard of it, and we are going to the fort. Come, boys, we must lose no time. Some of you give Bart and his prisoner a couple of horses, and hurry along. I had rather lose the whole season's trapping, than have that post destroyed by the red-skins."

The old hunter mounted Barteau on a horse, to which he bound him tightly, and followed the trappers, who were soon riding at a gallop toward the supposed scene of conflict.

Jeannette Labardie blushed and turned pale when she saw her reputed father bound as a prisoner and knew what sort of vengeance the wild trappers would be likely to execute upon him for his crimes; but she gave no other sign of recognition. She kept Annette and Henri close at her side, and George Searle had no desire to stray from Annette, except to claim his rifle from Bart Swannick.

In a short time the rapid riding of the band brought them in sight of Henning's fort, and they at once perceived that the plain around it was covered with savages, who were careering about in the wildest confusion, in pursuit of a mounted white man. With their rifles in readiness, the trappers prepared to charge down and scatter the red-skins.

"That's Jeems Musson, shore," muttered Barteau, as he came in view of the scene. "He has got into a scrape just as he thort, and now he is bound to be rubbed out. Thar's spunk in him, by thunder! Wal, I reckon that's the best thing he could hev done."

The old fellow's last reflection was caused by seeing Musson raise a pistol and shoot himself through the head, before his enemies could seize him. The Blackfeet, at the same moment, frightened by the approaching white men, wheeled and rode off toward the east, leaving the body of Musson lying on the plain. Some of the trappers were eager to pursue them; but Captain Speer would not allow them to do so, being afraid that they would get scattered and cut off.

When they reached the scene of the suicide, the body of Musson was placed on a horse, and the party hastened on to the fort, as it was growing dark. The gates were thrown open by Major Henning, who welcomed them most cordially, and heartily thanked them for coming in time to save his post from destruction.

To Jeannette the major was very deferential, assisting her to alight from her horse, and treating her with an unusual tenderness.

"I know that I have done you a wrong, Madame Labardie,"

he said. "I can say nothing more at present; but hope that you will permit me to try to make reparation for it hereafter."

Jeannette answered only by a bow and a blush, and was immediately taken in possession by Mrs. Henning, who greeted her with many tears and protestations of affection. She took the widow and Annette into her own room, where she listened with great interest to Madame Labardie's account of the loss and recovery of her child.

The next morning, Major Henning opened his stores, and treated the trappers, who had encamped on the plain, to an abundant supply of brandy, alcohol and other luxuries. Then there was rough reveling among these wild and free sons of the mountains, whose sports and antics would have afforded the major and his family and friends a great deal of amusement, if their attention had not been wholly occupied by an affair of much deeper interest to them.

After breakfast, when Major Henning and his wife, with Madame Labardie, her children, and George Searle were seated in conversation, Bart Swannick entered the room, bringing in Jean Barteau, whose demeanor now showed that he was thoroughly cowed.

"What do you want, Swannick? Why do you bring that man in here?" asked the major, observing that Madame Labardie shuddered and drew Annette closer to her side.

"That's suthin' I want to git fixed up, major," replied the hunter. "I've got a crooked kind of an idee into my head, and I allow that you and Old Frenchy here kin help me straighten it out."

"What do you mean? What have I to do with that man?"

"More'n you think far, I reckon. Didn't you lose a little gal, some seventy-five or thirty year ago, when you were sogrin' down on the Platte?"

"I did lose a little girl many years ago," eagerly replied the major. "I supposed that she was drowned in the Platte."

"I reckon she warn't drowned that time. I war passin' nigh the fort one evenin', when I seed Old Frenchy here—though he was a young chap then—hurrying down to the

river with a little gal in his arms. When he got to the river he tore off some of the gals fixin's and flung 'em into the water. Then he jumped on his hoss with her and rode off like a streak. I war aboot then, and afeared to go nigh the fort, 'cause I heerd that you war pressin' mountain-men, and it warn't none of my mix, nohow. When I heerd that you had lost a leetle gal, this thing got kinder kinked up in my head, and yesterday I allowed that I had better fetch Old Frenchy in here to you, to straighten it out."

"How did the child look? Do you remember how it was dressed?" asked Mrs. Henning, who was greatly excited.

"I warn't nigh enough to see, 'ceptin' that it had on a mighty purty red dress."

"It was my child! I felt that I must be right. Did you ever learn what became of her?"

"I heerd that Jean Barteau had a gal in St. Louey that he called his'n, and it kinder kinked up in my head that it mought be the same."

"It was the same! Jeannette, I have felt as a mother toward you, since you came to us after that terrible snow-storm, and now I know that you are my child. Thank God, whose ways are too wonderful for us to find out!"

"I mought as well say that you are right on that p'int," broke in Barteau. "I meant to tell you about it some time, so that you mought know who did it, and it ain't likely that I'll hev another chance. I did hope to hev some ease and comf't in my old age, but I reckon thar ain't much old age left to me now. You paid a tofable high price fur the fur of that floggin' you gave me, n't-ja?"

Major Henning could scarcely contain his indignation, and desired to inflict summary punishment upon the offender; but Major de L'Enfer and Annette interceded for him, and the major finally consented, not only to turn Barteau loose, but to send him away secretly, without the knowledge of the trappers.

"Old Frenchy" was never again heard of, and it is probable that he soon fell a victim to the fury of the Blackfeet, or to the wrath of some trapper who had a grudge against him.

"There is one thing that I am glad of," said George Searle,

when these events were being discussed in Major Henning's house, "I am glad indeed that I shall not be obliged to present to the Reverend Charles such a disreputable grandfather-in-law as old Barteau would have been."

"What do you mean?" inquired the major. "Do you expect to marry Annette?"

"That is the point of the joke, sir."

"You had better get my consent. She is very young, and you will have to wait a long time."

George Searle waited only a year, and then he wrote to inform his highly-respectable father that he had married the granddaughter of another highly-respectable gentleman of the old school, named Major William Henning.

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